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The Boundaries of Culture: Perceiving and Experiencing Place in Multi-ethnic Los Angeles

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The Boundaries of Culture:

Perceiving and Experiencing Place in Multi-ethnic Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Planning

by

Brady Joseph Collins

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Boundaries of Culture:

Perceiving and Experiencing Place in Multi-ethnic Los Angeles

By

Brady Joseph Collins

PhD in Urban Planning

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Chair

The extent to which cities can develop and market a brand has become a key strategy for maintaining competitiveness in the post-industrial economy in attracting tourism, investment, and job and population growth. In this context, ethnic populations in many Western cities have operationalized notions of culture in order to transform or reappropriate urban places, and improve the local quality of life. However, as cities become increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse, rather than a singular cultural identity occupying one neighborhood it is likely that multiple ethnic communities overlap in shared urban spaces. This dissertation offers an in-depth study of a highly diverse area of Los Angeles in order to examine the ways in which multi-ethnic communities operationalize culture, negotiate boundaries, and define their community and neighborhood. In doing so, it scrutinizes strategies of cultural urban revitalization that rely on static and singular notions of a spatial identity, and argues that planning scholars and community development practitioners support the cultural spaces of everyday life for which residents feel a strong sense of place attachment.

The thesis of Brady Joseph Collins is approved.

Dana Cuff

Miwon Kwon

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

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Brady Joseph Collins received a BA in Economics and Global Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and an MA in Political Science through the Civic Leadership Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is graduate of UCLA's Urban Humanities Initiative and recipient of the Shirley Hune Award from the UCLA Institute of American Cultures. He is also Development Associate and Policy Analyst at the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA).

INTRODUCTION

If you are in Central Los Angeles walking west from the corner of Beverly Blvd and Vermont Ave., you will immediately be struck by the number of Salvadoran Pupuserias and Pañaderias lining the sidewalk, their colorful storefronts blending together in a collage of pastels. If you turn south and head towards 3th street, you will come across a strip mall that houses a Korean pub, a Thai restaurant, and a Pakistani market and house of prayer. On most nights, a group will be huddled around a grocery cart in the parking lot, where two elderly women sell atol and tamales to hungry families, the smell of corn and cinnamon wafting through the intersection. Such a cacophony of sights, smells, and people is characteristic of this part of the city, which is also one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the country. While to many Angelenos it is widely known as Koreatown, in fact, it is technically the neighborhood of Little Bangladesh. If one continues to explore the area, these neighborhood names, which hang from street signs to demarcate their boundaries, seem arbitrary and obsolete. Given the palpable diversity of the area, is such a distinction necessary? To whom does this neighborhood really belong?

In *The Cultures of Cities* Sharon Zukin poses the questions "Whose culture? Whose city?" while reflecting on how images and representations of culture have become the business of cities. In fact, the extent to which cities can develop and market a brand has become a key strategy for maintaining competitiveness in the post-industrial economy in attracting tourism, investment, and job and population growth (Dinnie 2011). This is achieved through a variety of strategies of "cultural urban revitalization" (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris 2012), such as developing flagship architectural projects, promoting heritage industries (museums, monuments,

etc.), marketing diversity or cosmopolitanism, and establishing urban neighborhoods with artistic and cultural amenities.

The economic value of culture is derived from the fact that, in a time where ethnic diversity and multiculturalism are accepted and valued realities of the contemporary city, notions of "exotic" and "authentic" cultural urban experiences are marketable assets for communities (Zukin 1995, 2011). In this context, a variety of studies have been done on how ethnic populations have operationalized notions of culture in order to transform or reappropriate urban places, and improve the local quality of life (Angotti 2012, Loukaitou-Sideris 2002, Main 2012, Sciorra 1996). In this sense, cultural urban revitalization can act as a motor, or forum, for previously marginalized groups to gain economic and cultural capital by allowing them to attach their narrative to productive modes of community economic development.

However, as Western cities become increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse, it is unlikely that there will be a singular cultural identity occupying one neighborhood. Instead, multiple ethnic communities often overlap in shared urban spaces. Nevertheless, strategies of cultural urban revitalization, whether carried out by municipal governments, public-private partnerships, or even community-based organizations, have the potential to exclude certain cultural identities in favor of others. How can we be sure that the notions of culture purported by these strategies of cultural urban revitalization are shared and valued by the diversity of coexisting cultures and identities within a given neighborhood?

With numerous overlapping and intersecting ethnic neighborhoods, Central Los Angeles is a prototypical site for better understanding the intersection of community development and

cultural urban revitalization in multi-ethnic urban areas. It is in these urban areas that the notion of the ethnic enclave—a largely homogenous and spatially segregated ethnic neighborhood with an immigrant business sector—no longer holds. In recognition of the area's growing diversity, in 2006 the Los Angeles City Council created a new policy whereby residents can apply to have new neighborhoods designated. But this has posed new challenges and opportunities for community stakeholders seeking to define, improve, or claim territory. As with other immigrant communities and communities of color in Los Angeles, Wilshire Center is also undergoing a process of gentrification as individuals with higher income levels move into the area and new residential and commercial developments cater to the tastes of young urban professionals. In examining how different ethnic groups experience and engage with their neighborhood, this type of research inevitably explores how residents are responding to these particular changes. In this context, my dissertation will address the following research questions:

- *How are notions of the multi-ethnic neighborhood socially and historically constructed?*
- *How do multi-ethnic communities perceive of and experience shared urban space?*
- *How do multi-ethnic communities occupying the same or overlapping neighborhoods operationalize culture to claim territory?*

This dissertation begins with a review of the literature on ethnic enclaves, both historically, and more contemporarily as sites for cultural urban revitalization (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 provides a spatial and social context of the study area, Wilshire Center, and in doing so interrogates the legitimacy of neighborhood boundaries. Chapter 4 explains the theoretical framework for this research, which draws from the contributions of human geographers and environmental psychologists in establishing theories of place attachment. A discussion of the

research method and design follows (Chapter 5). The next three sections document empirical findings: Chapter 6, "A View from the Outside", analyzes framed representations of the study area by the local media in order to understand how various perspectives of the area are constructed, and how some of the more fictitious portrayals of the area serve the interests of certain community stakeholders. "Defining and Locating Culture" (Chapter 7) reports on a variety of surveys and cognitive mapping exercises to explore how different community stakeholders define the culture of their community. Drawing from extensive interviews and ethnographic data, Chapters 8 and 9 examine the contestations and collaborations that arise in multi-ethnic urban areas, as both insider and outsider groups pursue their interests. The final chapter (10) draws implications for policy and future research.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

A History of Ethnic Enclaves

While the United States witnessed the emergence of the first "Chinatown" in the late nineteenth century in San Francisco, the analysis and theorization of so-called "ethnic enclaves" in urban planning discourse did not appear until the 1920s, in the Chicago School's ecological model of urban development. The Chicago model perceived of the city as a series of concentric circles, each representing a different district with its own social and economic classes, spatially segregated from one another (Figure 1). Within each circle is a certain type of neighborhood, which is understood as a kind of species that competes with others by means of competition, invasion, and succession (Park et al 1925).

Within this model, the ethnic enclave formed the inner circle, and was the most marginal type of neighborhood. At this time, ethnic enclaves were thought of as ethnically homogenous, and spatially segregated neighborhoods comprised predominantly of foreign-born residents. Close to the central business district, these transitional inner-city areas, mostly occupied by immigrant groups, had a distinct "old world" character, as seen in both the social and physical landscape. Cultural festivals and practices, as well as architecture and physical signage, often reflected the host country of its residents. The ecological model posited that, over time, these ethnic populations would assimilate to mainstream culture, and thus begin to move outward from the city center to better neighborhood types. In this sense, shedding one's cultural norms for more accepted ways of life was imagined as a natural, ecological process that allowed immigrant populations to move up the socio-economic ladder in the contemporary city, and eventually "make it" to the suburbs.
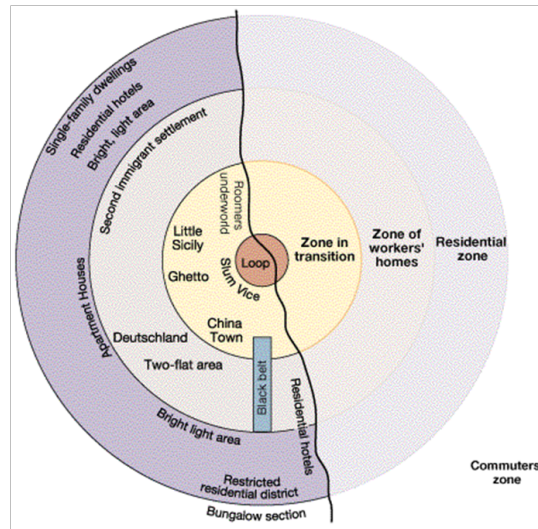
Figure 1: Model of urban social structure based off Chicago model, Cited in Layman 2015

Drawing from this ecological model, a number of studies of immigrant groups in the United States have investigated how minorities overcome obstacles that impede their entry into the mainstream of American culture (Handlin 1941, 1951; Wittke 1952; Child 1943; Vecolia 1977). In this sense, the movement from an ethnic enclave to the wealthy suburbs requires following one sequential path. According to many, the two overall most influential variables affecting a group's ability to make this move from economic hardship to socioeconomic mobility is 1) their knowledge of American culture; and 2) acceptance of the group by the host society (Warner and Srole 1945; Gordon 1964; Sowell 1981).

However, more recent studies have departed from this assimilationist perspective, and have instead found that ethnic populations have in fact used their shared identity and spatial proximity as a means through which to exchange information and mutual assistance, participate in social and cultural activities, and develop a political voice (Alba and Chamlin 1893; Chan

1986; Mazumdar et al 2000; Suttles 1968; Zhou 1992). From this perspective, ethnic minorities and their native culture do not simply dissolve into mainstream society. Moreover, many immigrant communities actually prefer to preserve their distinct identities (Greeley 1971; Glazer and Moynihan 1970).

But what is the economic benefit of maintaining one's ethnic identity? One theory suggests that cultural preservation allows marginalized ethnic populations to prevent a cultural division of labor (Hechter 1977; Despres 1975), which refers to when ethnic groups are confined to particular job sectors. In this sense, ethnic preservation is a means for marginalized groups to organize themselves for collective action with the goal of moving up the socio-economic ladder. On the other hand, new immigrants also suffer from a lack of knowledge of their host country and legal vulnerability (as undocumented immigrants are fearing deportation), allowing firms to cut costs by exploiting the cheap labor they are willing to provide (Sassen-Koob 1980; Piore 1975,1979). Lastly, there are some that argue that the persistence of ethnic cultures is actually a result of the continuation of colonial practices that perpetuate the spatial isolation and occupational disadvantages of certain groups, namely American Indians, African-Americans, and Chicanos (Barrera 1980; Blauner 1972; Geschwender 1978).

Nevertheless, while these structural theories effectively critique the Chicago ecological model, Portes points out that they also limit our scope of understanding of immigrant communities as being either inferior and exploited or militant and preservationist. Noting the rise of occupationally skilled immigrants (Portes 1976, 1981), political refugees (Zolberg 1983; Keely 1981), and middleman minorities, or minorities that are distinct in nationality, culture and race from both superordinate and subordinate groups (Bonacich 1978; Light 1972), Portes

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demonstrates that there are several immigrant stories that defy the either/or understanding of assimilation versus preservation.

For example, Jewish migrants of German origin who migrated to Manhattan in the late 19th century achieved remarkable economic success within the first generation. While some of this can be attributed to the size and rapidity with which German Jews arrived, Portes suggests that what allowed this group to prosper was the fact that their production and marketing of goods was not restricted to their ethnic community, but rather targeted the general economy (Rischin 1962; Howe and Libo 1979, cited in Portes and Manning 1986). And, this occurred despite the fact that Jews held onto their language, religion, and culture (Wirth 1956; Howe 1976), and were widely discriminated against in mainstream society (Dinnerstein 1977). Portes and Manning (1986) explore a similar story for Japanese migrants to the western seaboard during the first half of the 20th century, as well as Korean migrants to Los Angeles, and how a combination of social cohesion, business clustering, and competition in the general economy allowed these groups to move up the economic ladder in a matter of decades.

Portes and Manning (1986) argue that ethnic enclaves are the result of three prerequisites: 1) the presence of a substantial number of immigrants with prior business experience; 2) the availability of sources of capital; and 3) the availability of sources of labor. They pay particular attention to how labor relations influence the development of "ethnic enclave economies", arguing that successful enclaves have a sizable productive sector (not simply retail), compete directly in the general economy, and are concentrated and spatially identifiable. While Portes and Manning's theorization is useful in understanding how enclave economies develop, and in drawing distinctions among minority groups based upon labor relations, the concept of the ethnic

enclave as a spatially bounded territory has become complicated by recent phenomena in the contemporary global city, and particularly in megacities such as Los Angeles. In this sense, while the aforementioned studies of ethnic enclaves provide important theoretical tools for understanding how immigrant communities establish themselves and change overtime both spatially and economically, these studies are largely historically specific to the first and second waves of immigration to the US.

As the free flow of capital and people brings an increasingly diverse group of individuals in close proximity to one another, some have begun to view the city as a network or "space of flows" rather than a set of bounded places (Castells 1989). In this regard, a variety of studies have challenged the notion that the ethnic enclave as a homogenous community that is spatially and culturally segregated and survives through self-sufficiency (Abrahamson 1996; Fong 1994; Krase 2002; Waldinger 1993; Werbner 2001). This complication of the ethnic enclave is part a result of the dispersion of ethnic populations to the suburbs, or "ethnoburbs", where multiculturalism is more readily embraced (Li 1999). On the other hand, in some cities, the ability to clearly define where a neighborhood begins and ends, and what the neighborhood's identity is, becomes more difficult (Greinacher 1998; Sassen 1996; Sen 2000). Arjun Appadurai adopts the term "ethnoscapes" to describe such places, as "landscapes of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons who constitute an essential feature of the world" (1996, 192).

The issues facing contemporary ethnoscapes differ from those of the traditional ethnic enclaves of decades past. Zukin (1996) discusses two approaches: the first emphasizes how shifts in the political economy and movement of capital influence who owns and can use land. The

second, which involves what she calls the "symbolic economy", focuses on how social groups are represented, included or excluded, in the built environment. As she says, "...the endless negotiation of meanings in built forms--in buildings, streets, parks, interiors--contributes to the construction of social identities (1996, 43). Understanding the symbolic economy requires an examination of how neighborhood spaces are perceived of by different insider and outsider groups. For example, a Thai restaurant may simply be a place to find ethnic food for one patron, but may represent a key community space and site of social exchanges for another.

In this context, the contemporary ethnoscape is also the site of new forms of conflict and competition. As diversity and multiculturalism have become both accepted and valued aspects of the city, culture has taken on new economic power (Zukin 1996). The next section discusses how the growing cultural economy has impacted the ways in which ethnic enclaves develop.

The Value of Diversity

What is the *culture* of a city, or of a neighborhood? "Culture," perhaps the most widely contested term in the social sciences, is often thought of as a set of shared customs, beliefs, traditions, and histories. However, culture can also be what Raymond Williams referred to as "a whole way of life," or the totality of practices and lived experiences of people (Williams 1958). As the world becomes increasingly urbanized, bringing together people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds to live in the same city or neighborhood, locating or defining a place's culture becomes increasingly difficult. Lewis Mumford's epic work, *The Culture of Cities*, which demonstrated that cities have throughout history been the hub for human civilization's biggest problems and most promising solutions, used a somewhat vague notion of "culture," perhaps

best seen as a motor for human progress (Mumford 1938). Yet culture in the post-industrial city no longer holds to this modernist perspective.

While a definition remains contested in academic literature, notions of culture have become an essential ingredient in the economic development strategies of contemporary cities around the world. This is the result in part of the transition from industrial to post-industrial society, the local response to globalization, and emerging environmental and lifestyle trends attracting a certain type of urban professional (Evans 2004). As an expanding population of individuals with higher levels of education and disposable income are moving to the cities from rural areas and especially the suburbs, city governments are increasing spending on cultural amenities and creating specialized agencies and policy-making bodies to provide additional cultural services for the growing public demand (Bianchini 1993). The culture of cities, therefore, becomes the image and lifestyle of cities that attracts private development, increases consumption by residents and tourists, and enhances the local quality of life[1].

In his popular book, *The Rise of the Creative Class,* Richard Florida (2002) argues that in order to achieve employment and population growth, cities should develop a culture of openness, cultural diversity, and cosmopolitanism that attracts workers of the "creative class." He considers this an essential ingredient for economic growth in the post-industrial, consumer economy. As Sharon Zukin says in *The Cultures of Cities,* "With the disappearance of local manufacturing

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[1] The culture of cities may also refer to cultural artifacts and products, such as art, architecture, and music. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, these cultural outputs constitute part of a broader set of amenities that are established or promoted by city agencies and organizations for the purposes of attracting investment, consumption, and tourism.

industries and periodic crises in government and finance, culture is more and more the business of cities: the basis for their tourist attractions and their unique competitive edge" (1995, 1).

Criticism abounds that this new urban imperative–the race to attract the creative class--is simply an extension of neoliberal urban politics under a new guise, and creates a discourse that glosses over the social, cultural, and economic realities of post-Fordism (Peck 2005; Scott 2006; McCann 2007; Wilson and Keil 2006; O'Callaghan 2010; Catungal et al 2012). Additionally, critics charge that building the creative city may contribute to gentrification and displacement of lower income populations, including some of those in the lower economic scales of the creative class (i.e. artists) on which this strategy depends (Ley 2003). The local or authentic nature of urban places is at a loss as cities compete for a "universal particular," which refers to a generic urbanism of commodified spaces that more often than not turns urban spaces into areas of segregation and simulacra that manipulate user behavior, rather than allowing for spontaneous social interaction (Sorkin 1992).

However, a variety of studies have been done on how ethnic populations have transformed or reappropriated urban places to reflect the new cultural patterns of everyday life and the new social organization of the community (Angotti 2012, Loukaitou-Sideris 2002, Main 2012, Sciorra 1996). Today, many immigrant communities are no longer the "other" in today's society, but play an increasing role on the economic and cultural activity of today's cities[2]. The economic value of culture is derived from the fact that, in an time where ethnic diversity and

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[2] Particular immigrant populations, such as refugees, asylum seekers, and Muslim migrants, certainly remain the "other" in Western cities, because of their relative sparseness, inability to integrate into the mainstream economy, and/or xenophobia in host countries. The immigrant groups discussed here are mainly economic migrants that arrived after the 1965 Immigration Act, and many of which are upwardly mobile.

multiculturalism are accepted and valued realities of the contemporary city, notions of "exotic" and "authentic" cultural urban experiences are marketable assets for communities (Zukin 1995, 2011).

It is in these ethnicized neighborhoods, or "ethnoscapes" (Appadurai 1996), that cultural urban revitalization strategies hold great potential for community development. For example, London's Chinatown, while both a branded urban space and "global ethnic supermarket" for tourists, is an important cultural and social resource for the local community, including new migrants and those generations born in London (Sales et al 2009). In *The Philadelphia Barrio*, Frederick F. Wherry traces how a Puerto Rican neighborhood used its cultural heritage as an impetus for community organizing, economic development, and cultural representation (Wherry 2011). The neighborhood adopted a "progressive strategy" of revitalization in that it relied on participation in the arts and local cultural production to strengthen community identity (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris 2012).

The emergence of so-called "cultural quarters" (Roodhouse 2009)--urban districts with historic and cultural significance that translate into economic value for the city--coincides with the appearance of a new kind of cultural tourism that has gained significance in the past decade, whereby tourists take on a more anthropological concern with people and place. By offering something aesthetically "unique," cities add symbolic weight to their competitiveness, or rather, create more value out of their urban spaces by inserting them into the cultural economy (Zukin 1995). In this sense, the tourism industry is seen as an economic engine with the potential to benefit immigrant communities through their consumptive practices. The challenge for planners

is to develop urban places where visitors and residents can coexist, allowing for tourism practices that preserve local identities without exploiting, or displacing them.

In the contemporary city, cultural quarters also play an integral role in developing a branded image of multiculturalism, or cosmopolitanism for a city. Hoffman (2003) argues that, in Harlem, tourism and the "marketing of diversity" have been equalizing forces by rebalancing uneven social and spatial developments that are leftover from the Fordist era (2003). While there remains a wedge between the interests of visitors and residents, cultural revitalization has actually led to increased cultural differentiation, allowing the local communities to find economic benefits in niche "ethnic production". Kosnick (2009) similarly argues that Berlin has effectively branded itself as cosmopolitan city by engaging with its immigrant communities and drawing attention to the history of labor migrants in Europe and their lived experiences. This has allowed them to contest dominant versions of branding in Berlin, which often rely on consumer and investor-oriented image campaigns, and give the immigrant communities control of how they are represented: "immigrants, they realized, can act as 'pioneers of cosmopolitanism' through their transnational affiliations and potential to 'hybridize' cultural practices and identifications" (Kosnick 2009, 41). Overall, the most relevant aspects of these strategies is that, unlike those that focus on flagship cultural projects, such as museums and stadiums, or attracting the creative class (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris 2012), they emphasize the autonomy and control of the local population over the representation and development of their community.

The intersection of the cultural economy and community development continues to be an important object of study for researchers, and a challenge for planners seeking to revitalize communities without exploiting or displacing them. As mentioned, the community-led cultural

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urban revitalization of ethnic neighborhoods has the potential to improve the quality of life of residents and local economies while also preserving spatial identities. Nevertheless, these studies have largely focused on traditional ethnic enclaves, or relatively homogeneous and spatially segregated districts. This dissertation focuses on these very same issues in highly diverse urban areas where the notion of the ethnic enclave, composed of a singular ethnic group, no longer holds. In doing so, I hope to extend upon the body of work on ethnic enclaves established by previous scholars (Abrahamson 1996; Despres 1975; Fong 1994; Hechter 1977; Krase 2002; Portes and Manning 1996; Waldinger 1993; Werbner 2001), and draw closer attention to those urban areas that act not only as gateway communities for new arrivals, but where 1.5 and second generation immigrants begin to consolidate themselves to establish neighborhoods that are known for being both ethnic as well as economic and cultural centers. These urban areas will become increasingly important objects of study as the changing politics of immigration in the US create new pathways for immigrants to become upwardly mobile and active members of society.

Furthermore, in the early decades of the 21st century, as Western cities become increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse, it is unlikely that there will be a singular cultural identity in a common urban territory. In other words, as multiple ethnic communities overlap in shared urban spaces, strategies of cultural urban revitalization often draw from a singular notion of culture, and thus have the potential to exclude certain local identities. In places that are culturally heterogeneous, different ethnic groups are likely to perceive of their neighborhood, and their neighborhood's culture, differently. As Gupta says, in a world where culture is no longer autonomous and geographically bound it is necessary to "move beyond naturalized conceptions of spatialized cultures and to explore instead the production of difference within

common, shared, and connected spaces" (1997, 45). We must therefore return to Zukin's

question posed at the beginning of *The Cultures of Cities*: whose culture? whose city?

CHAPTER 3 - THE MULTI-ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOOD

With numerous overlapping and intersecting ethnic communities, Central Los Angeles is a prototypical site to better understand the intersection of community development and cultural urban revitalization in multi-ethnic urban areas. These areas demand that we depart from previous notions of the singular ethnic enclave: within a five-mile radius of Central Los Angeles, one can come into contact with often overlapping neighborhoods with names such as Little Armenia, Thai Town, Koreatown, Historic Filipinotown and Little Bangladesh, each equipped with their own ethnic restaurants, bakeries, cafes, and specialty supermarkets. In addition, architecture, public murals, and other street art offer aesthetic signifiers of particular cultures. Perhaps most importantly, each neighborhood carries an official designation from the city, which hangs from street signs.

Nevertheless, the official signs belie the complex identities of these areas. Despite the neighborhood names, the residents of Central Los Angeles (like many parts of the city) are overwhelmingly Latino/a. In addition, the boundaries of these respective neighborhoods are decidedly vague; the City makes no real effort to demarcate where these neighborhoods begin and end. In 2006, in recognition of ambiguous neighborhood boundaries and the City's growing diversity, the City Council created a formal process whereby groups of residents or business owners could create a petition and apply for official designation. However, rather than making the city more legible, this new policy has only led to more confusion as to what is considered a neighborhood and what is not, and where these neighborhood boundaries end and begin. As Roseto Woo notes in *LAtitudes: An Angeleno's Atlas:*

[N]either the city, nor the county, have any official neighborhood boundaries…So you're left with a mishmash of geographies that you might be able to organize the information into: zip codes, police precincts, community planning areas, census tracts—none of these mean much to most people. You might know your own zip code, but you probably don't have any idea of how big it is or where the next one begins. If your data was for New York, you could say something definitive about a borough. But even the broadest regions of Los Angeles have trouble finding a firm definition. The Eastside? the Westside? Forget it. (2015, 6)

This dilemma is the motivation for this study. Yet, rather than try and discern ownership of a particular neighborhood, I seek to unpack how community stakeholders of the multi-ethnic neighborhood perceive of and experience space, and how groups use cultural practices for the purposes of constructing a place identity. In doing so, I explore the contestations and collaborations that arise.

As the purpose of this research is to problematize singular definitions of the "neighborhood" and the "community", I have not selected exact neighborhood boundaries in Los Angeles for my study. As will be shown, to some the study area is known as Koreatown; to others it is Mid-Wilshire, or East Hollywood, or Little Bangladesh, or Thai Town. With that said, Figure 2 below depicts the general area in question, which I refer to throughout as Wilshire Center. For the purposes of this dissertation, Wilshire Center is roughly bounded by Hollywood Boulevard to the north, Pico Blvd. to the south, Virgil St. to the east, and Wilton Place to the west. I drew loose boundaries around my study area based upon the relative high concentration and overlap of different ethnic populations and designation neighborhoods, which will be explored below.

Figure 2: Map of general study area

Wilshire Center 1965-1990

Once known as the "Ambassador District", because of the iconic Ambassador Hotel on

Wilshire Blvd, this part of Los Angeles was the stomping grounds for the new cultural elite of

the city in first half of the 20th century. However, by the 1950s, the combination of racial

tensions left over from the Watts Riots and a fear perpetuated by the media and popular culture

initiated the out-migration of the white middle-class from the inner-city areas of Los Angeles,

including Central Los Angeles (Avila 2006). As a result, the percentage of whites in Los Angeles

County fell from more than 80 percent to near 40 percent between 1960 and 1990. With that

said, the white flight out of Wilshire Center was quickly replaced by the in-migration of various

new immigrant groups. With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, unprecedented

numbers of immigrants to the US from countries across East Asia arrived in Southern California from throughout the Pacific Rim.

The Immigration Act of 1965 effectively eliminated race as a consideration of immigration, and removed the previous system whereby immigration quotas (that largely favored Western European countries) maintained a limit of 20,000 immigrants per year for each country in the Eastern Hemisphere. Many thousands of residents from Mexico and Central America crossed the US-Mexico border illegally during this time, settling in neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles. James Paul Allen and Eugene Turner's pivotal book, *The Ethnic Quilt: Population Diversity in Southern California* (1997)*,* tracks the demographic patterns in Southern California during this time period. Their maps indicate that significant populations of immigrant groups from East Asia, Central America, and Mexico settled in Wilshire Center. As shown in Figure 3 below, by 1990 the study area had the highest concentration of foreign born residents of anywhere in LA County.
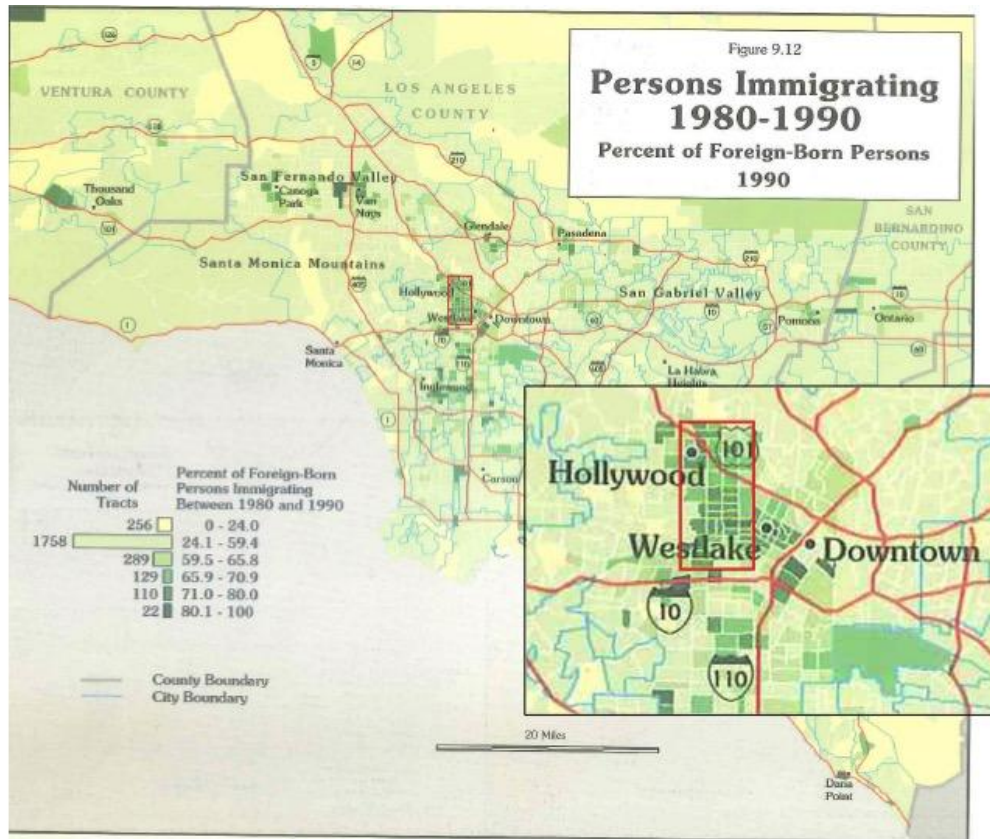
Figure 3: Foreign born residents in LA Country, Allen & Turner 1997. Study area highlighted in red.

Korean immigrants began concentrating around Jefferson Ave shortly after the passage of the new immigration law, and slowly moved north towards Olympic Boulevard in the subsequent decade (Givens 1974; Yu et al 2004). By the late 1970s, Koreans were operating the majority of businesses in this area, as well as on 8th street, making this the center of Korean commercial activity (Park 2005). The first annual Korean Street Festival took place in 1974, and by 1980 Koreatown had established itself as the hub of the greater Korean community in Southern California--during this time, the number of Koreans in Los Angeles increased from 12,000 to 35,000.

Figure 4 shows that by 1990, Koreans were the most concentrated ethnic group in Wilshire Center, with significant clusters spread throughout the County. In recognition of the Korean influence on this area, the city began to include the name "Koreatown" on highway exit signs--the first kind of ethnic neighborhood designation (albeit, informal) in this part of the city. Only Little Tokyo and Chinatown, which are adjacent to Downtown LA farther east, had been designated as ethnic neighborhoods at this time, in recognition of their historical importance to the City. While Korean business first popped up on Jefferson in the southern portion of Central LA, today Korean business, as well as churches, reach as far north as Beverly Ave., as far west as Crenshaw Blvd, and as far east as Alvarado St.
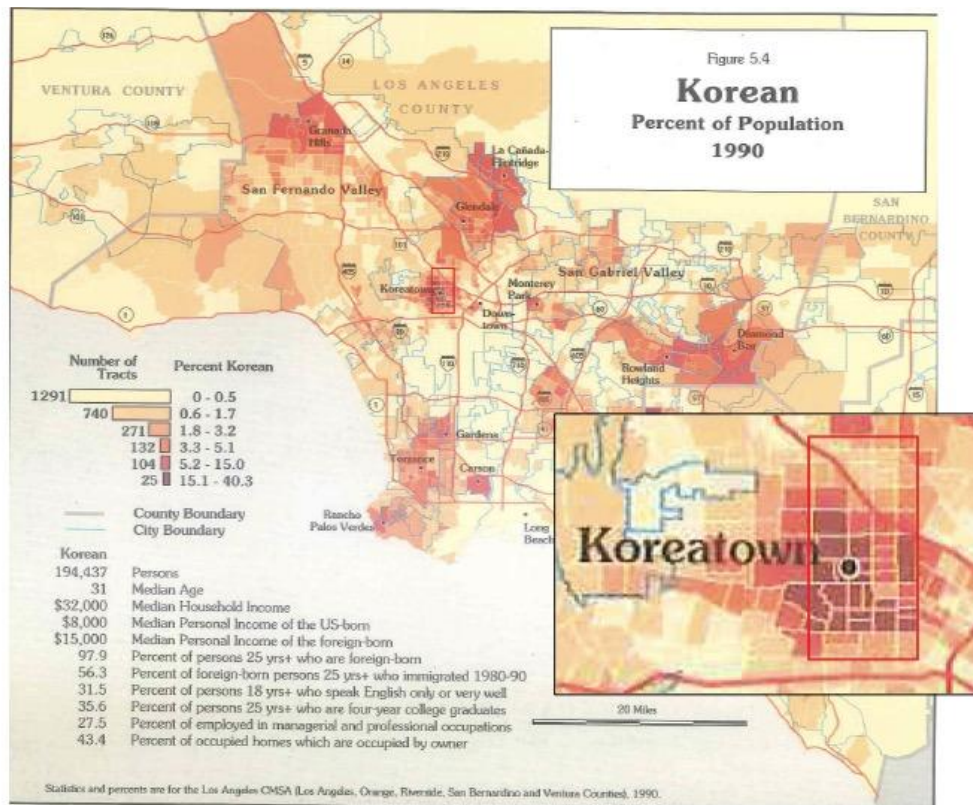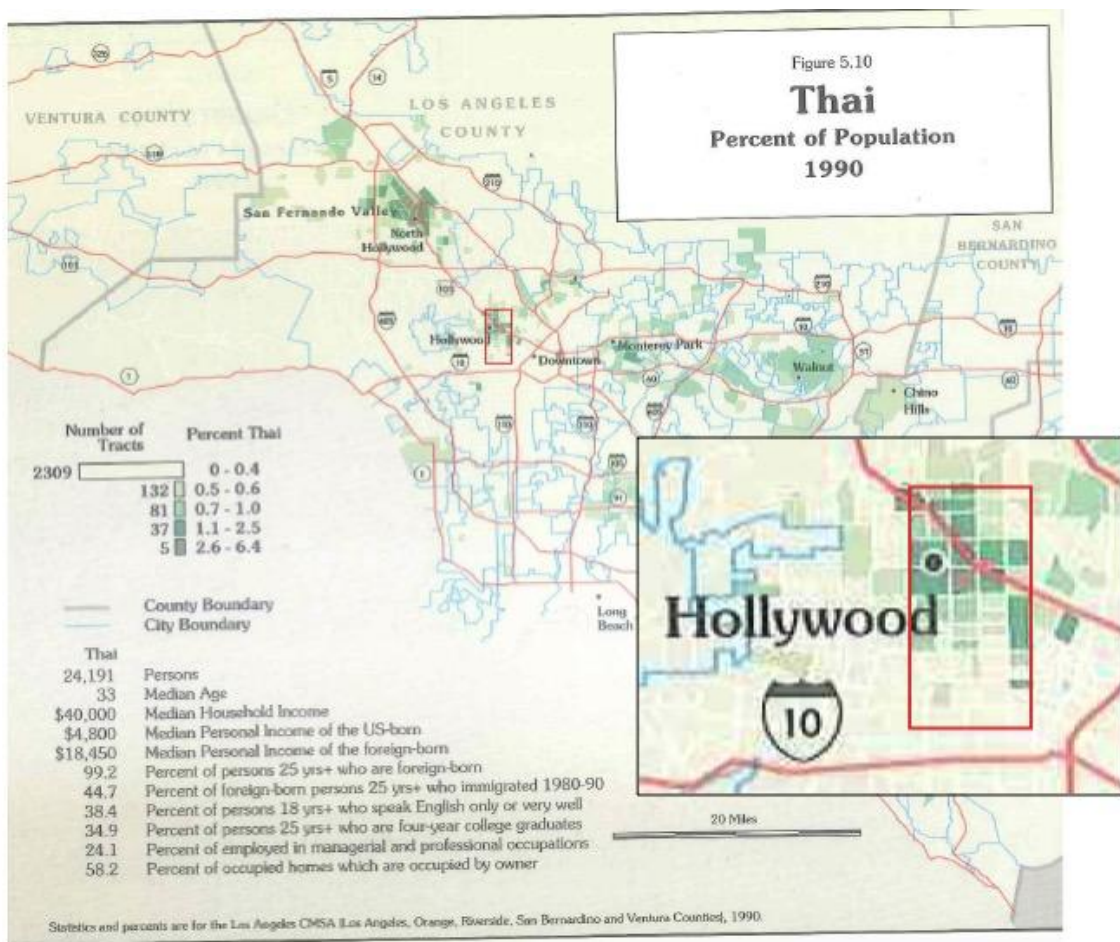

Figure 4: Korean population in LA Country by percentage, Allen & Turner 1997. Study area highlighted in red.

Thais settled slightly north of the Koreans, in an area often referred to generally as East Hollywood (see Figure 5). Thai groups were attracted to the area due to the image of Hollywood that had been sold to them through global exports of television and film[3]. By the late 1970s, East Hollywood had a number of Thai restaurants, markets, gas stations, travel agencies, banks, and beauty parlors, and a local newspaper (Allen and Turner 1997). While there had been gradual Thai migration to Los Angeles over the post-war decades, it was only during Asia's regional financial crisis in the 1980s that a wave of less-educated, lower-skilled Thai migrants came to Los Angeles to find work.

Figure 5.10
Thai
Percent of Population
1990

Number of Tracts	Percent Thai
2309	0 - 0.4
132	0.5 - 0.6
81	0.7 - 1.0
37	1.1 - 2.5
5	2.6 - 6.4

——— County Boundary
——— City Boundary

Thai
24,191	Persons
33	Median Age
$40,000	Median Household Income
$4,800	Median Personal Income of the US-born
$18,450	Median Personal Income of the foreign-born
99.2	Percent of persons 25 yrs+ who are foreign-born
44.7	Percent of foreign-born persons 25 yrs+ who immigrated 1980-90
38.4	Percent of persons 18 yrs+ who speak English only or very well
34.9	Percent of persons 25 yrs+ who are four-year college graduates
24.1	Percent of employed in managerial and professional occupations
58.2	Percent of occupied homes which are occupied by owner

Statistics and percents are for the Los Angeles CMSA (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura Counties), 1990.

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[3] Interview with founders of Thai Town.

A large number of Filipinos also settled in the area, though far fewer compared to Thais and Koreans. Compared to Filipinos, Thais and Koreans were relatively well-educated, and thus were better able to open businesses that served both the ethnic market as well as the general economy, which may help explain why these populations remained more concentrated (Allen and Turner 1997).

East Hollywood also received a significant number of Armenian immigrants throughout the 1960s and 1970s as the result of a number of geopolitical events, from the Lebanese War to the crash of the Soviet Union. The Armenian diaspora came from Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Soviet Armenia. These Armenian immigrants settled in apartment buildings in East Hollywood (see Figure 6), drawn to an area that was relatively cheap and underdeveloped, and had tall, densely packed apartment buildings that reminded many of their place of origin[4]. By the 1990s, the area held numerous Armenian owned businesses, primarily restaurants, bakeries, and groceries.

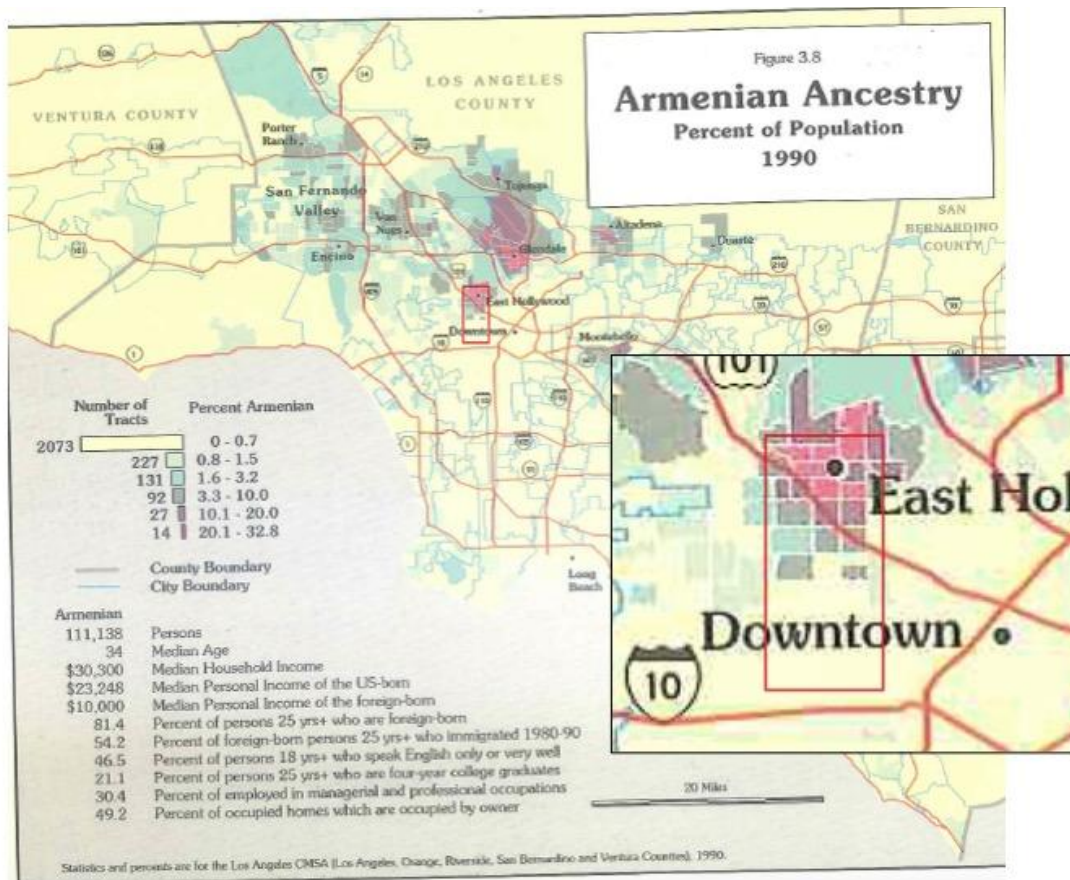[4] Interview with head of Little Armenia non-profit organization.

Figure 6: Armenian population in LA Country by percentage, Allen & Turner 1997. Study area highlighted in red.

While not discussed as a specific ethnic group in *The Ethnic Quilt*, a Bangladeshi population--mainly working class and muslim--also grew in the area during this time period. According to the 2000 Census, there were only 1,700 Bangladeshis in all of Los Angeles County. However, according to the Bangladeshi consul general, there are now around 15,000, with some 25,000 in all of Southern California, making the region the nation's second largest home to Bangladeshis after New York City (Jang 2009).

Despite the quickly growing concentrations of Korean, Thai, Armenian, and Banlgadeshi communities in this area, during the 1965-1990 period, the majority of residents in

Wilshire Center were Latino/a . As shown in Figure 7, Mexican immigrants spread throughout

Central Los Angeles (and the surrounding areas), though in particular this area witnessed high

concentrations of Guatemalan and Salvadoran populations (see Figures 8 and 9). Unlike most

Koreans, Thais, and Armenians, these immigrant groups arrived with low average educational

and income levels, and have the highest proportion of adult migrants. Most of these groups

began to arrive in the 1980s. While the exact numbers are not clear, it is estimated that the total

number of undocumented residents from Mexico in Southern California was as high as 1.3

million during this time. Many settled just west of Downtown, in Westlake and Pico-Union,

though as their populations continued to grow, they expanded westward into what is commonly
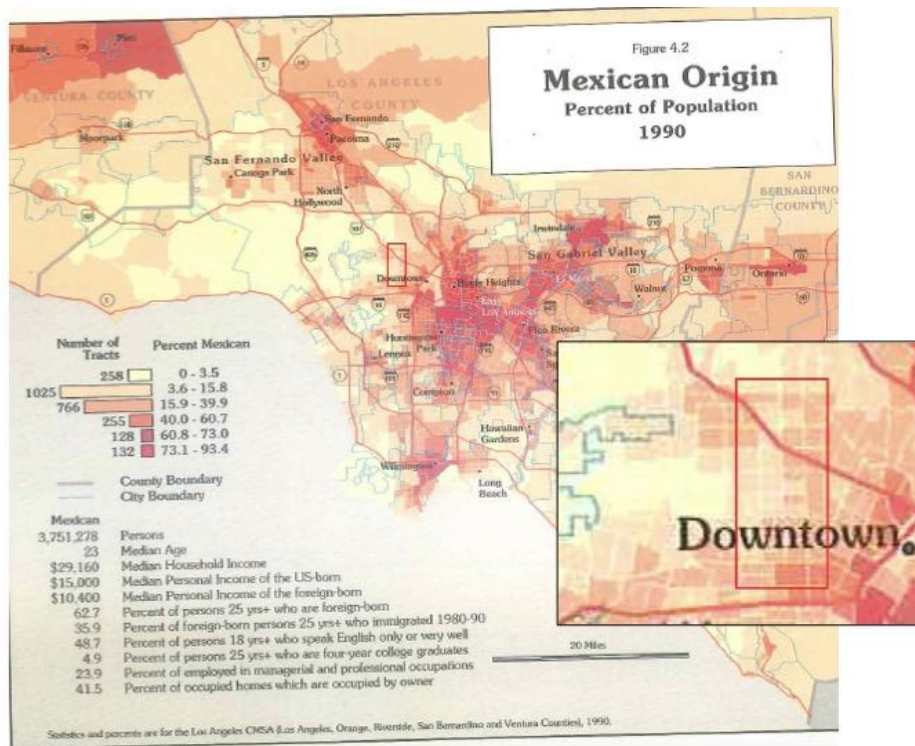
considered to be Koreatown.

Figure 7: Mexican population in LA Country by percentage, Allen & Turner 1997. Study area highlighted in red.
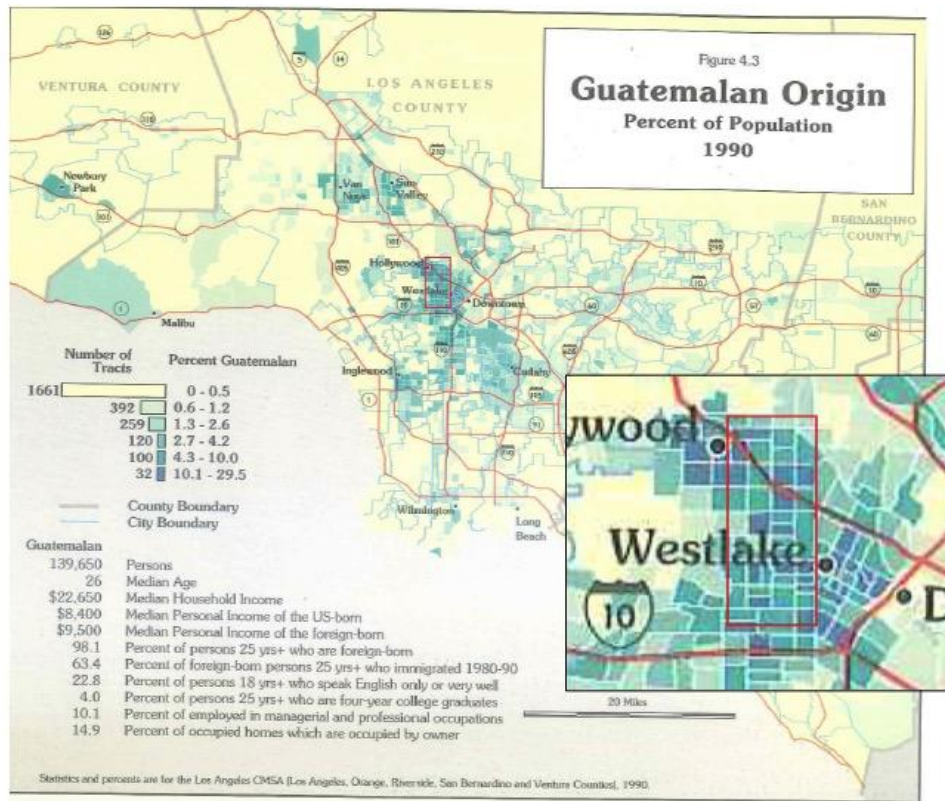
Figure 8: Guatemalan population in LA Country by percentage, Allen & Turner 1997. Study area highlighted in red.
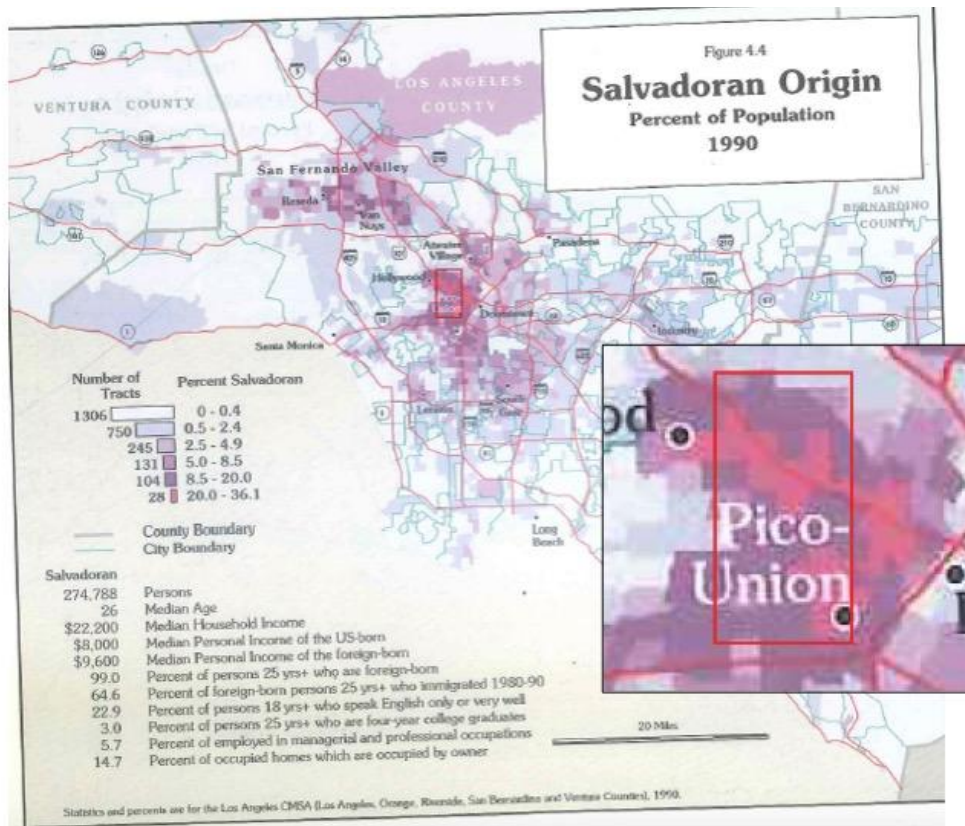
Figure 9: Salvadoran population in LA Country by percentage, Allen & Turner 1997. Study area highlighted in red.

Combining all of these maps together, we see that, within the study area, more census tracts had a majority of Guatemalan-Salvadoran immigrants in 1990 than any other group, followed closely by Koreans, and then Mexicans and some Japanese (see Figure 10).
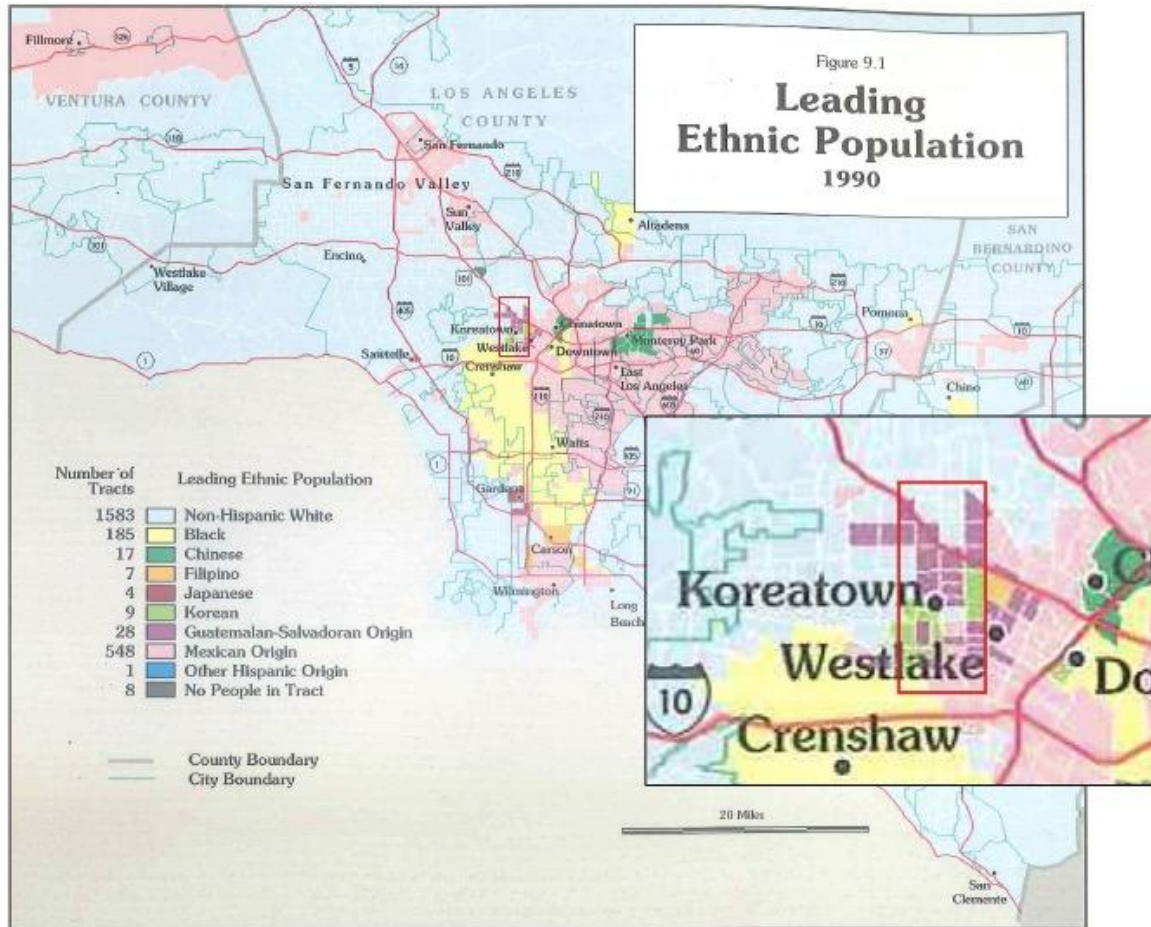
Figure 10: Leading ethnic populations in census tracts by percentage, Allen & Turner 1997. Study area highlighted in red.

The *Ethnic Quilt* has since been updated (Allen & Turner 2015), and its authors have noted that significant demographic changes have occurred in LA County from 1990 to 2010. And, in recognition of the city's growing diversity, in 2006, the City Council created a new policy whereby groups of individuals could create a petition and apply for official designation. Other than briefly explaining the cultural significance of the area, the only eligibility criteria for this designation is that petitioners receive 500 signatures in support from residents within the boundaries they themselves define. As will be discussed in following sections, this policy,

combined with the recent demographic shifts and developer-backed gentrification of low-income

residents, have drastically changed the social and physical landscape of Wilshire Center.

Wilshire Center Today

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wilshire Center had experienced the simultaneous

out-migration and in-migration of different groups, allowing ethnic populations to consolidate

themselves in their businesses in major commercial areas while also bringing newer and greater

diversity to the area. This happened most notably in the southern section, along Wilshire Blvd.

Many of the large corporations on this street, such as Union Bank, Texaco, IBM, and Getty Oil,

vacated their large office buildings by the early 1980s, thereby allowing Korean merchants and

entrepreneurs to establish themselves on 6th St and Wilshire (Park and Kim 2008). By the 1990s,

the majority of businesses along these two commercial strips were owned by Koreans. Even

historic landmarks of this area, such as Chapman Plaza and the Brown Derby strip mall, were

occupied by Korean businesses (Yu et al 2004).

Image 1: The historic Wiltern Theater on Wilshire Blvd, in the heart of Wilshire Center, Kaijo 2014

Wilshire Center's recent history is also marked by the 1992 civil unrest that occurred in the aftermath of the Rodney King trial, in which four police officers were acquitted of what many viewed to be an excessive force during a traffic arrest of Mr. King. Within a matter of minutes after the verdict was announced, African American protesters took to the streets in South LA in opposition to what they viewed to be structural racism and injustice. The group soon moved north towards Wilshire Center. While some protested peacefully, a significant number of individuals looted and burned stores, and engaged in other random acts of violence. Armed with guns, many Korean business owners set up informal barricades in front of their storefronts and Korean-owned strip malls in an attempt to defend themselves from the riot. The image of Korean men, huddled on rooftops with rifles as if in a military skirmish, was captured by the media and

perpetuated a sense of unease and tension between the Korean and African American

communities (Abelmann and Lie 1995).

Although the unrest depressed land values in the area, this part of the city has undergone

massive reinvestment in the past two decades. The pace of development was arguably originally

shaped by investment by South Korean corporations (Choy 1979). However, it was also in part a

response to the unrest. In 1994, the City's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA)

designated the area as one of their redevelopment project areas (the "Wilshire Center/Koreatown

Redevelopment and Recovery Project"), in an attempt to draw investment from both the public

and private sectors (Kwong 1992, Ong & Hee 1993). Since then, the combination of several

mega-development projects, the expansion of the Metro line, the City's liberal granting of

restaurants in the area with conditional use permits for on-site sales of alcohol, as well as the

emergence of trendy, high-end health spas, have made this area--and specifically, Koreatown--a

site of rapid development and gentrification (Park & Kim 2008). Much of the new development

is also due to the fact, that in the midst of a building boom in Los Angeles, the area's community

plan allows for much higher density construction than other parts of the city. This development

has had a profound impact on the residential population of the study area. Figure 1 and Table 2

below illustrate the changing demographic and economic landscape of Wilshire Center compared

to LA County.
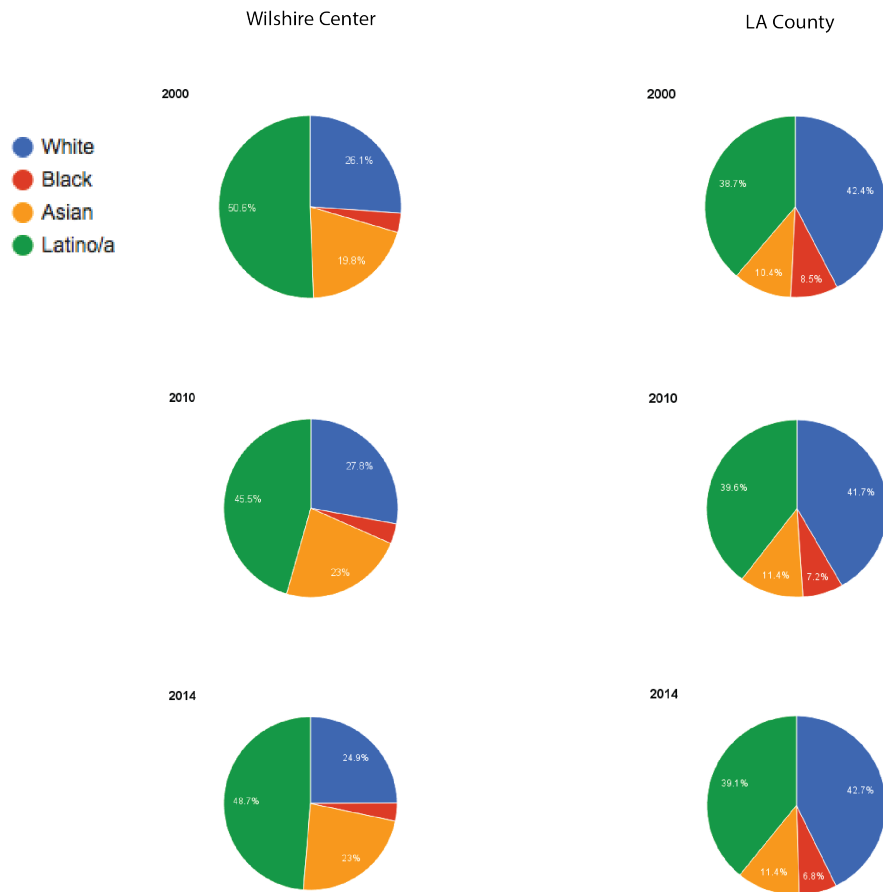
Figure 1: Race/ethnicity of study area compared to LA County[5]. Source: 2000, 2010, and 2014 data drawn from ACS 5-year estimates.

	Wilshire Center	*LA County*
2000 Population	219,799	9,519,338
2010 Population	213,493 (-2.87%)	9,758,256 (+2.51%)
2014 Population	212,313 (-0.55%)	9,974,203 (+2.21%)

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[5] Measure of individuals who claim to be of one race of the four most populous racial/ethnic categories. This does not include individuals who claim to be of two or more races, or other statistically insignificant single-race categories.

2000 Density[6]	45,086	2,344
2010 Density	43,793 (-2.87%)	2,420 (+3.24%)
2014 Density	43,551 (-0.55%)	2,458 (+1.57%)
2000 Median Income[7]	$21,721	$42,189
2010 Median Income	$33,263 (+53.13%)	$54,878 (+30.08%)
2014 Median Income	$33,054 (-0.63%)	$55,746 (+1.58%)
2000 Avg Family Size	3.5	3.61
2010 Avg Family Size	3.36 (-4%)	3.58 (-0.83%)
2014 Avg Family Size	3.4 (+1.19%)	3.69 (+3.07%)
2000 Median Age	30	32
2010 Median Age	33.8 (+12.67%)	35.9 (+12.19%)
2014 Median Age	35 (+3.55%)	35.3 (+3.55%)

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[6] Density measured as population per square mile.
[7] Measure of median household income.

2000 Edu Attainment[8]	7.81%	9.93%
2010 Edu Attainment	15.24% (+7.42%)	10.19% (+0.25%)
2014 Edu Attainment	13.91% (-1.32%)	11.82% (+1.63%)
2000 Median Rent[9]	$521	$643
2010 Median Rent	$861 (+62.96%)	$1,017 (+58.16%)
2014 Median Rent	$951 (+10.50%)	$1,129 (+11.01%)
2000 Vacancies	2606	137,153
2010 Vacancies	4585 (+75.94%)	207,847 (+51.56%)
2014 Vacancies	528 (+12.19%)	219,684 (+5.70%)

Table 2: Demographic and Economic Profiles of study area and LA County, Source: 2000, 2010, and 2014 data drawn from ACS 5-year estimates

Most notable is the fact that the population of Wilshire Center has been falling in recent years alongside a drastic increase in vacancies. This is likely due to the effects of gentrification, as low-income residents are evicted from their homes and property owners transition their units into

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[8] Educational attainment measured as percentage of population with at least a bachelors degree.

[9] Measure of median household contract rent per month.

market-rate units raze the land for new construction. Walking around the study area cranes are visible in almost all directions, many of which are for large mixed-use projects along or close to commercial corridors. New middle-class residents moving into the area are likely a factor in the growing educational attainment observed in Wilshire Center. Nevertheless, Wilshire Center, and in particular the area around Koreatown, remains extremely dense compared to the County. In fact, it is one of the densest areas of Los Angeles (Sanchez et al 2012). Median rent and household income have experienced the same percentage increases as County averages, though the majority of residents at the Wilshire Center remain low-income.

Despite these changes, Allen & Turner's update of *The Ethnic Quilt (2015)* found that, with the exception of black enclaves, ethnic enclaves in Los Angeles County have remained relatively stable geographically between 1990 and 2000. Most relevant for this dissertation, they also concluded that:

- The total number of residents of Armenian ancestry in Los Angeles County has increased significantly. However, the number of Armenians in the study area has decreased. Many of these individuals have relocated to Glendale, which has the highest concentration of individuals of Armenian ancestry of anywhere in the US.

- While Salvadoran residents have been moving out of Wilshire Center (and moving towards the San Fernando Valley, in particular) in total numbers, there remains a high percentage of Salvadorans in the study area. The same trend is true for Guatemalans, but there is a higher total number and percentage of Guatemalans in the study area.

- The Thai population in the study area has remained relatively stable geographically.

- The Korean population in the study area has grown, especially in the southern portion, and spread to neighboring areas.

Figure 11 below shows the dominant ethnic group in each census tract in 2010. Aside from the notable growth and spread of the Korean population, not much has changed. Wilshire Center is still highly diverse, though it is relatively less diverse compared to other parts of the County, where multiple ethnic groups are redistributing.
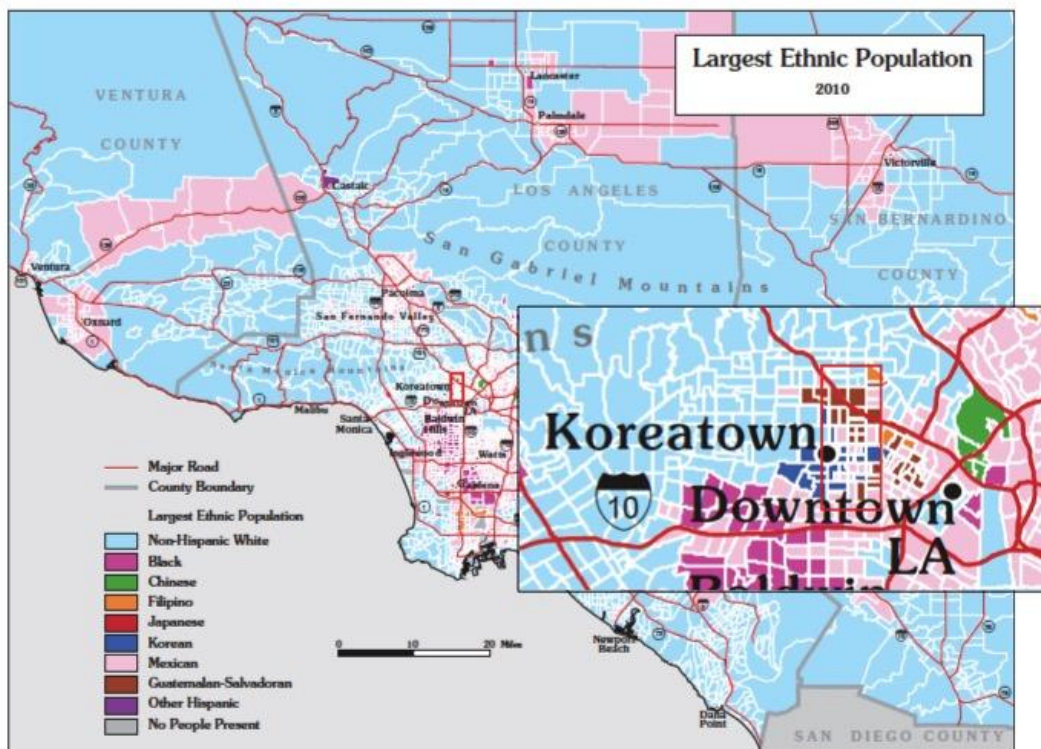
Figure 11: Leading ethnic populations in census tracts by percentage, Allen & Turner 2015. Study area highlighted in red.

Still, Wilshire Center remains the County's first multi-ethnic enclave. With so many different ethnic populations living in close proximity for several decades, this diversity is reflected in the physical landscape of the area (see images 2 and 3).

Image 2: Building on Beverly Blvd. with both Korean and Salvadoran establishments, Kaijo 2014

Image 3: Apartment complex on Western Ave. with street-level businesses catering to both Korean and Spanish speaking residents, Kaijo 2014

The Built Environment of Wilshire Center

As one large grid system, Wilshire Center is comprised of around 8-10 commercial corridors (depending on where you draw the boundaries) that run east-west. Two major thoroughfares running north-south, Western Ave. on the west, and Vermont Ave on the east, act as physical barriers between Wilshire Center and its surrounding neighborhoods. While my study area stretches slightly beyond these two borders, they act as bookends to the series of commercial strips that run east to west throughout Wilshire Center. Figure 12 below demonstrates the land-use patterns in the study area--commercial strips are separated by two or three city blocks of residential areas comprised of both low-density single family and multi-family buildings.

Figure 12: Land-use in middle portion of study area, Sanchez et al 2012

Moving north or south from one commercial corridor to the next, these streets, like rungs on a

ladder, each show a different side of the community, or communities, that live here. For

example, walking on 6th St, which has become the Koreatown entertainment district, one is

likely to encounter mostly Korean residents and young professionals sitting at outdoor cafes,

shopping or, on the weekends, barhopping. Moving north to Beverly Ave, one will begin to enter

the predominantly Central American section of Wilshire Center, and find many Salvadoran

bakeries and shops, though still interspersed with Korean restaurants. Even farther north, on

Hollywood Blvd, the influence of the Thai population is on display: buddhist statues abut the

sidewalk next to Thai shopping centers.

The diversity of these neighborhoods is also evident through the numerous strip malls that stretch along the commercial corridors. Figure 13 below illustrates the diversity of ethnic small businesses in a northern section of Wilshire Center, a portion with a tremendous mix of such businesses that can largely be viewed as a microcosm for the larger study area.
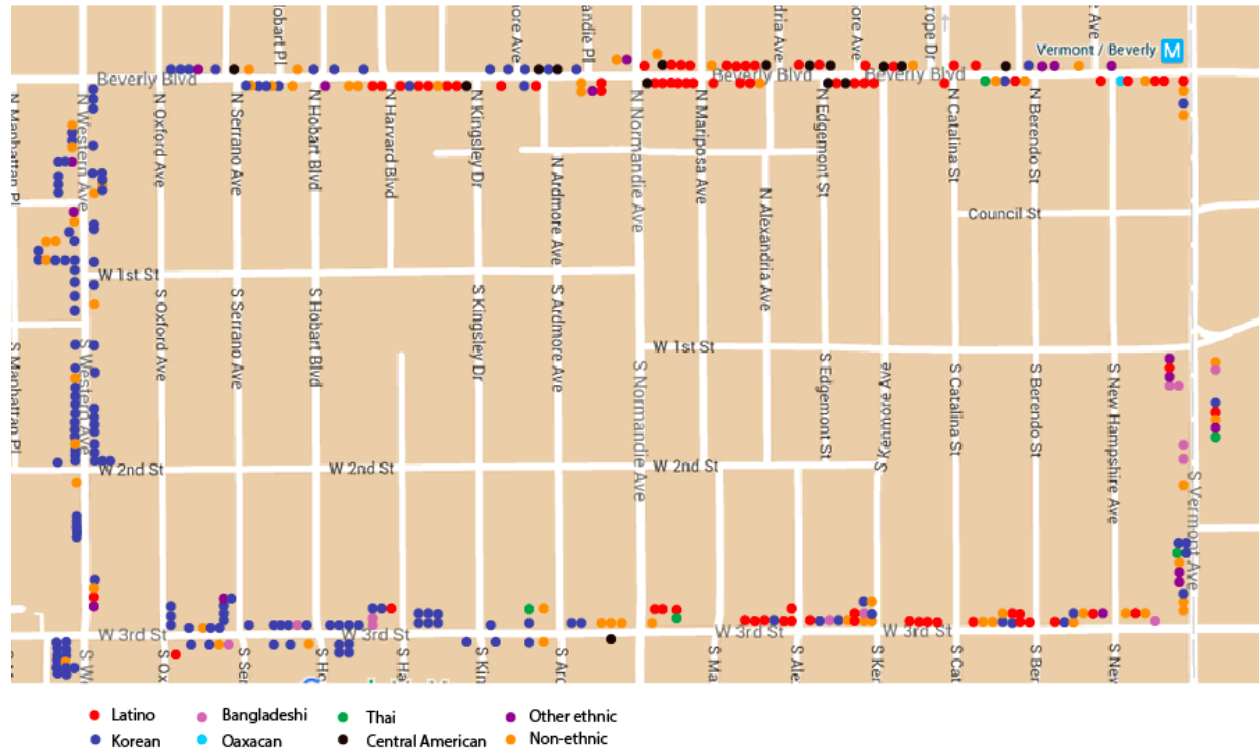
Figure 13: Map of ethnic businesses in northern section of study area. Source: Author's survey

The tall signs on the corner of each strip mall identify the businesses. Written in native languages and advertising ethnic products, they also help indicate that certain populations are more prevalent in particular areas. As shown above, there are several areas on the commercial corridor where businesses of a particular ethnic group cluster, and thus where one is likely to encounter more of a particular ethnic group in stores and on sidewalks. With that said, for the most part these commercial corridors are highly varied in terms of ethnic ownership. It is common to see

numerous different languages on strip mall signs (see Images 4 and 5 below)--a marker that this

area is cohabited by different groups.

Image 4: Strip mall business signs advertising to multiple publics on San Marino St., Kaijo 2014

Image 5: Strip mall business signs advertising to multiple publics on 3rd St., Kaijo 2014

In addition to the businesses, wall murals and homemade signs hung in store windows are additional markers of local identities (See Images 6 and 7). In come cases, they advertise businesses and services hidden from the pedestrians' sight. In other instances, they are portraits of national pride for recent immigrants.

Image 6: Guatemalan mural on Alexandria St advertising shipping services, Kaijo 2014

Image 7: Bangladeshi mural on 3d St, Kaijo 2014

Other murals, often installed by street artists, are more politicized in nature. For example,

Armenian artist, Arutyun Gozukuchikyan (colloquially known as "Art Via Art"), has painted

several murals in the area known to be Little Armenia that commemorate the Armenian genocide

and the struggles of the Armenian diaspora (See Image 8).

Image 8: Armenian mural in Little Armenia, Abram 2014

Decorative street elements, from architectural styles to stylized street lamps and statues, are more blatant markers of place identity (See Images 9-12). Such markers are most prevalent in Koreatown and Thai Town. As will be discussed later, this is due to the presence of strong community leaders representing these ethnic groups, who use their social and political capital to attract investment in themed architecture and cultural tourism.

Image 9: Korean pagoda in Koreatown, Brightwell 2010

Image 10: Korean-style tiled rooftops on commercial strips in Koreatown, Kaijo 2014

Image 11: Decorative sidewalk elements in Thai Town, Johansson 2014

Image 12: Decorative street lamps in Thai Town, Trinidad 2012

Neighborhood Designation

The most formal marker of a neighborhood's identity is its official designation by the City. Within Wilshire Center there are five officially designated neighborhoods: Thai Town, Little Armenia, Little Bangladesh, Koreatown, and the Salvadoran Corridor.

Image 13: Official neighborhood designation from the Los Angeles City Council, Source: Barnsdall Alliance 2010

As mentioned, in 2006 the City Council created a new policy that allowed for communities to apply for this designation. Prior to 2006, this was done on an ad-hoc basis in response to the mobilized efforts of community groups.

For example, in 1994, a campaign to designate East Hollywood as Thai Town was initiated by the Thai Community Development Corporation (CDC). The 1992 assessment indicated that an overwhelming majority of Thais in Los Angeles supported an officially designated Thai commercial and community center in East Hollywood. While the campaign, suffered a major setback after the Northridge Earthquake of 1994, eventually, in 1998, Thai CDC and community stakeholders resurrected the campaign for Thai Town and organized the Thai Town Formation Committee to spearhead this effort, receiving their official designation in

1999[10]. Shortly afterwards, in 2000, after several years of political organizing and advocacy efforts, the Armenian Society of Los Angeles was able to receive designation of "Little Armenia" in 2000. According to the City's records, this was done in recognition of its historical significance to the Armenian population in Los Angeles, and to promote "neighborhood pride, multi-cultural/ethnic exchange, and tourism"[11]. However, according to the vague boundaries chosen for these two neighborhoods, Thai Town is inside of Little Armenia.

When the City finally formalized this process in 2006, they made it relatively easy for new neighborhoods to be designated. All that applicants need is 500 signatures from residents of an area that they themselves define. In addition to a title, they must also briefly explain why this neighborhood deserves its own title. The politics of this designation process, and applicants' stated motivations for engaging in it, varies across neighborhoods and ethnic groups (Sheth 2012). The most recent designation in this area was the El Salvador Community Corridor in 2012, which runs along Vermont Ave. roughly between Olympic Blvd and Adams Blvd. Unlike other designation applications, community groups sought recognition at the State level first. Working with Assemblymember Mike Davis, the neighborhood was able to get a State Resolution recognizing the Salvadoran Corridor. Only after this did they seek approval from the City Council. Thus, they actually skirted around the City's local policy--once they had State approval, they only needed a vote by the City Council rather than a formal petition[12]. Lastly, in 2015 an application for an "Oaxacan Corridor" was submitted. Below is a brief timeline that summarizes the different neighborhood designations in the study area, as well as a map that

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[10] ibid
[11] See http://www.littlearmenia.com/html/little_armenia/00-1958.asp
[12] See City Council file 10-0002-S69

illustrates the designated areas of these neighborhoods as outlined in City Council's approval

documents.

Table 3: Timeline of neighborhood designations in study area[13]

October 27, 1999 – LA City Council officially designates **Thai Town**

October 6, 2000 – LA City Council officially designates **Little Armenia**

January 31, 2006 – Motion passed to establish a policy by which communities can file an

application for a neighborhood to be named or renamed.

October 22, 2008 – Application submitted to rename the area of **Little Bangladesh**

March 20, 2009 – Application submitted to rename the area of **Koreatown**

August 20, 2010 – LA City Council officially designates **Koreatown** and **Little Bangladesh**

August 25, 2012 - LA City Council approves designation of **El Salvador Community Corridor**

October 13, 2015 - Application submitted to rename the area of **Oaxacan Corridor**

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[13] See Los Angeles City Council files 99-2007, 00-1958, 08-2885, 09-0606, 11-0646, 15-1222
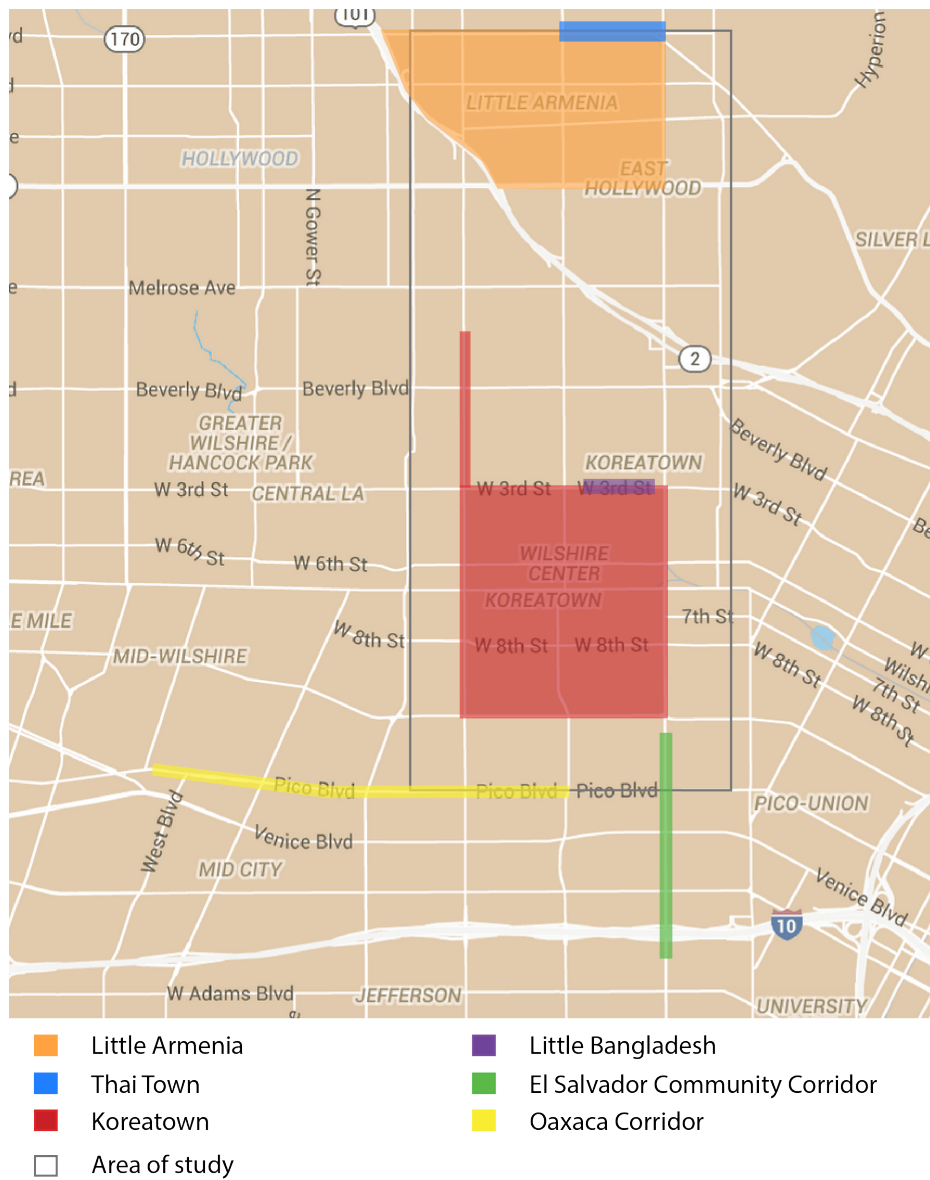
Figure 14: Boundaries of designated neighborhoods, Source: Los Angeles City Clerk

Whether there is a direct economic benefit from the official designation is unclear, and is outside the scope of this dissertation. As was explained, of all the areas with designated neighborhoods, Koreatown has experienced the most rapid development. Still, there are a number of other factors, such as zoning and local politics, that influence the economic success of

neighborhood designation (Sheth 2012). Moreover, recent studies suggest that development and

business growth are largely a result of transit-oriented development in Thai Town and

Koreatown, a trend on the rise as the City invests in light-rail expansion (Macedo & Nem 2014;

Pappas 2014).

Despite the City's attempts to encourage neighborhood designation, the boundaries of

these places are widely disputed, both amongst residents and local institutions. Seen below

(Figures 15 and 16) are maps of "Koreatown" and "East Hollywood" respectively, as defined by

the *Los Angeles Times* project "Mapping L.A."[14], an interactive website that allows users to

select neighborhoods and view relevant demographic and economic data.
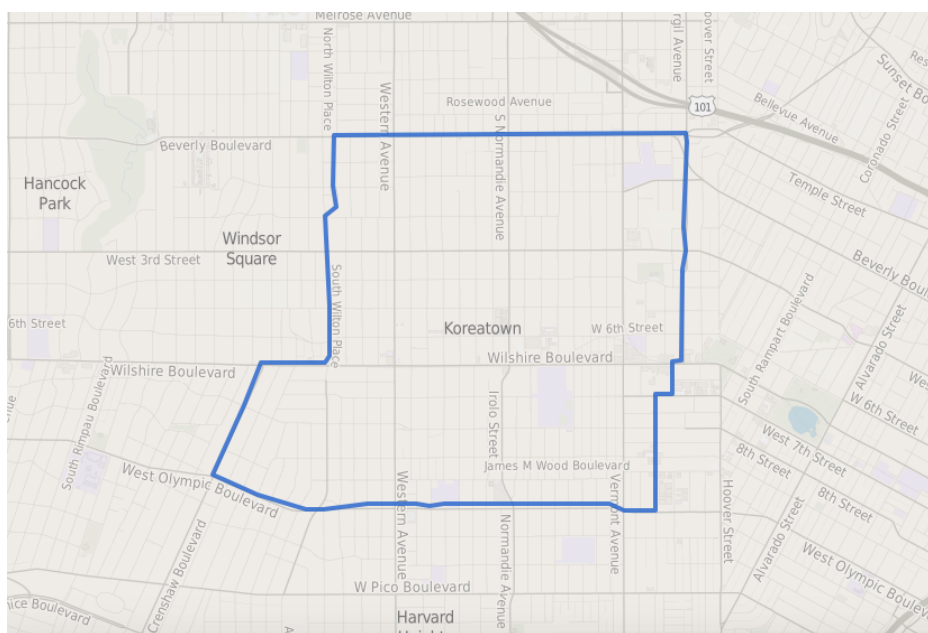
Figure 15: Boundaries of Koreatown, Source: LA Times
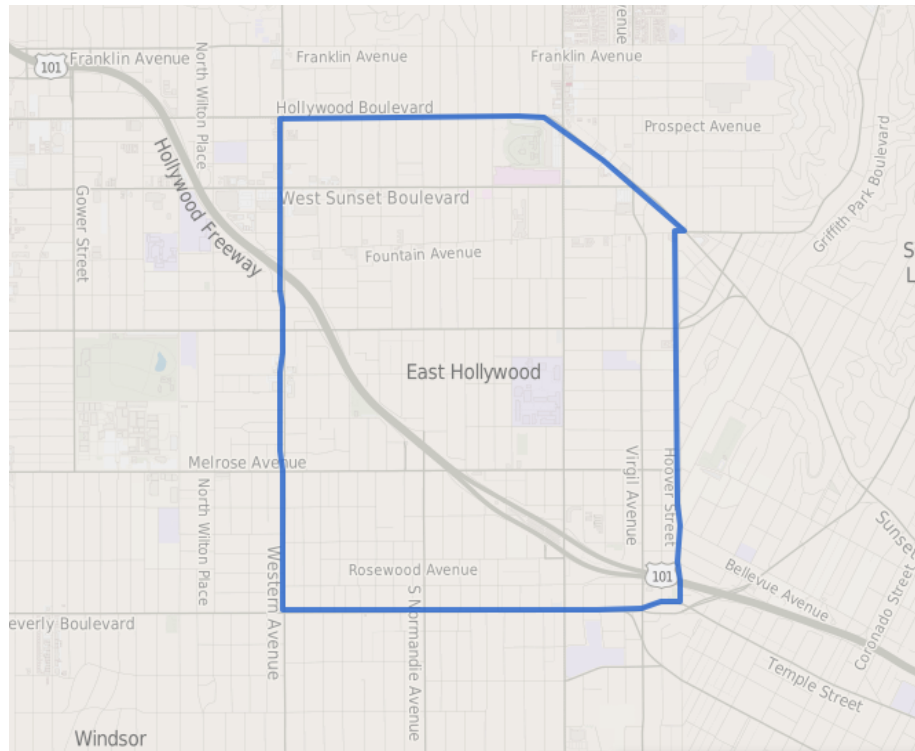
Figure 16: Boundaries of East Hollywood, Source: LA Times

The LA Times drew these neighborhoods based on the layout of census tracts, using the U.S.

Census Bureau's boundaries of 88 cities and 43 census-designated places. In recognition of the

near impossibility of drawing clear and concise borders for every neighborhood in Los Angeles,

the *LA Times* noted that their goal was to follow a set of principles intended to make the map

visually and statistically coherent. With that said, users of the website were quick to dispute their

boundaries. In the comments section of the "Koreatown" neighborhood, one resident argued that:

> "Koreatown is mis-mapped here. I live in St. Andrews Square (between Beverly and
> Third, Wilton and Western). Our population is extremely multi-cultural and not more
> than one-quarter Korean. It is an injustice to the rest of the population to claim this
> neighborhood as part of Koreatown. The ethnic "branding" of neighborhoods is, in
> general, misguided and offensive. Cities are living, breathing organisms that change over
> the decades. Neighborhoods may be named, but they should never be 'branded'."
> (Consentino 2009*)*

Another common measure of neighborhood boundaries is the City's Neighborhood Council system, which divides Los Angeles into 96 council districts. The map below (Figure 17) shows the boundaries for the "Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council". These boundaries are drawn by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE), the municipal body that governs Los Angeles' neighborhood council system[15].
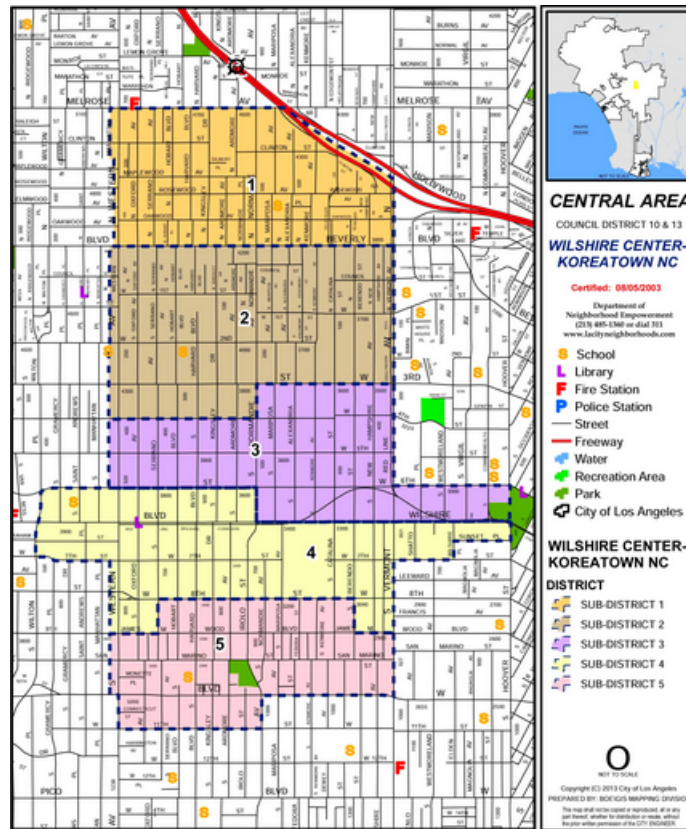

Figure 17: Boundaries of Wilshire Center-Koreatown, Source: WCKNC

The variety of different measures and interpretations of neighborhood boundaries extends even further. And, Koreatown, despite being the largest and most well-known ethnic neighborhood in Central LA, it is also perhaps the most ambiguous. As argued:

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[15] See http://wcknc.org/advanced-stuff.html

Some of the city bodies that have an internal designation of Koreatown include the WCKNC (Wilshire Center Koreatown Neighborhood Council), the CRA (Community Redevelopment Agency), LAPD, PAFD, and LAUSD, and it is recognized in the *LA Times*, the *NY Times,* and local TV news, and such popular online collections of human knowledge as Wikipedia and Google.com (Woo 2015, 6)

With so many overlapping ethnic populations and interpretations of where these neighborhoods begin and where they end, their designated names seem arbitrary and obsolete. The extreme overlap of businesses, murals, and other informal markers of place identities from various ethnic groups further complicates any notion of a pure and singular ethnic identity of the neighborhood. Given the palpable diversity of the area, are such distinctions necessary? To whom do these neighborhoods really belong?

In order to explore questions of how different groups perceive and experience their neighborhood, and the culture of their neighborhood, I draw from theories of place attachment. Such theories unpack how urban residents create meaningful relationships with the built environment, and thus allow for a deeper understanding of the intersection of culture and place. A particular emphasis is therefore placed on how socio-cultural practices build attachment to place, and how that attachment is influenced by one's perception of the identity of a place.

CHAPTER 4 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Academics often refer to the occurrence of a "spatial turn" in the social sciences, in which explorations of "space" and "place" took increasing importance in examining the evolution of society. Edward Soja first coined the term spatial turn in the mid 90s, drawing from the work of French sociologist Henri Lefebvre in order to theorize about the existence of a "third space", or imagined space, that exists separately from space as a physical and mental object (Soja 1996)[16]. This conceptualization brought an additional spatial perspective to contemporary social theory, which had previously mostly focused on temporal and historical analyses, and in doing so recognized the importance of place for individuals, groups, and cultures.

Although it preceded Soja's writing of third spaces, the study of "place attachment" similarly draws scholarly attention from a variety of fields, such as geography, sociology, and psychology as well as urban planning, to the study of urban spaces and why people attach meaning to them. While scholars across disciplines agree that places are, in general, spaces that have been given some meaning through personal, group, or cultural interaction (Altman & Low, 1992, Milligan 1998, Tuan 1977), defining place attachment is more contested. For the purposes of this dissertation, place attachment is seen as "the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional or affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual's and the group's understanding of and relationship to the environment" (Low, 1992, p. 165).

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[16] The central argument of Soja's work on third spaces is that explorations of spatiality have been confined to two approaches: as material forms to be mapped and analyzed, or as representations of the social significance of spaces. His third space comprehends both material and mental spaces, but also goes beyond to new modes of spatial thinking that take into consideration spaces at the margins, and examine the interplay of race, class, gender, and the politics of identity.

Place attachment, as a theoretical concept, plays an important role in informing the methodologies used in this dissertation as well as the data analysis. To demonstrate this, this section will unfold as follows: first, the determinants of place attachment are examined to better understand what social and physical conditions make human experiences in places "meaningful," thereby enabling individuals to feel affection for a physical setting. Drawing from environmental psychology, the next section looks at the relationship between cognition and place attachment to connect the psychological and physical elements of place attachment. Then, place attachment is looked at as a socio-cultural process, whereby different groups develop place attachment as both a sense of group belonging and a system of social learning. Finally, notions of "place-identity" are discussed to demonstrate the ongoing importance of place attachment to urban planners, which is to help answer the question: how can urban planners and designers construct meaningful places for people in the contemporary city, while still balancing notions of authenticity and diversity? As will be argued, doing so requires a better understanding of how and why individuals develop an attachment to places, and an engagement with the different cultures and ethnic groups in the community.

Determinants of Place Attachment

The experience one has in a particular place builds the foundation for one's development of place attachment. This distinguishes experienced places from places that an individual might only know from the outside, through reading about them or seeing images of them (Tuan 1977). An individual's experience of place depends on their ability to move through it and thereby

distinguish it from another place. In doing so, the sensory experiences (sight, sound, smell, and touch) that an individual incurs allow places to achieve a concrete reality in the minds of visitors (Tuan 1977). Thus, in the realm of human geography a distinction is made between space and place, in that places are spaces that we come to know better and endow with value (Tuan 1977).

Scholars differ on their emphasis on the importance of social interactions for place attachment. As has been argued, in some instances the social relations that a place signifies may be equally or more important to the attachment process than the physical landscape itself (Riley 1992, Hufford 1992, Low 1992, Lawrence 1992, Pellow 1992). For Milligian, the "phenomenon of place attachment" is a social construct that comes from the emotional link formed by an individual to a physical site through social interaction (Milligan 1998). However, as Relph notes, places which are "communally experienced" are only particular forms of the phenomenon of place, and "although common experience is unquestionably an important element of understanding place, it does not suffice to define its essence" (Relph 1976, 36). While social interaction can allow individuals to endow mutually experienced places with value, all places are ultimately individually experienced--in other words, the experience of place is distinctly personal (Relph 1976). For Yi-Fu Tuan, meaning is attached to place through "intimate experiences," whether communal and social or individual and introspective. While difficult to express or make public, whether or not an individual can have an intimate experience of place depends on their ability to "pause" in it: "place is a pause in moment...the pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value." (Tuan 1977, 138).

In shaping the possibilities for human experience, the layout and design of the built environment can foster or hinder attachment to place. As already mentioned, humans have meaningful experiences in places if they are discernible from other places (Tuan 1977). Countries, regions, landscapes, settlements, buildings, all form a series of places that become meaningful to humans when they are comprehensible and "explain" their unique character through the detail of their surroundings (Norberg-Shulz 1977). Attachment to place can exist at different physical scales, from a single home (Ahrentzen 1992, Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992) to an entire landscape (Riley 1992). For example, humans can develop attachment to natural landscapes, as it may represent their "homeland" or speak directly to their sense of belonging. However, space is not merely passive, waiting to be experienced, but is constantly being created and remade by human activities (Relph 1979). For immigrant populations who must leave their homeland, actions that seek to alter or transform the built environment so that it reflects their country of origin are pursued for the purpose of creating a new place for immigrant populations to become attached to. More recent scholarship on place attachment has identified various "place processes" by which individuals and communities build place attachment (Seamon 2014). According to David Seamon, through creative shifts in policy and interventions in the built environment, such as public space enhancements or sidewalk improvements, places can be both created and intensified, thereby creating place attachment for users. As will be discussed later, in the context of Los Angeles, some of these efforts include creating whole new neighborhoods. Ultimately, architecture, or the human-made environment, is important as both a cause and outcome of attachment to a geographical territory.

Because one's experience of place is filtered through one's cognitive system, it is important to understand how the cognitive abilities of an individual affect his or her interpretation of the scale and complexity of different places. Taking into account conceptual systems demonstrates the integration of the physical and the psychological. It necessitates that we try to understand not only people's interaction with and within the physical environment, but how they perceive and understand these inter-related processes as well (Canter 1977).

Jack L. Nasar puts forth a model relating the socio-physical characteristics of places and human responses. In his view, an individual responds to the social and physical characteristics of place through emotional reactions and cognitive appraisals (Nasar 2011). Emotional reactions come from one's perceptions of whether a place is positive or negative, exciting or boring, calming or stressful. Their cognitive appraisals stem from these reactions and inform their overall conclusions about whether the place and its people are safe and friendly (Nasar 2011). These two elements in turn affect an individual's behavior in a place. The implications of this model for urban designers is that in shaping places for use, it is important to understand how one's vision of a place dominates one's experience of it (Nasar 2011).

David Canter similarly focuses on how people's cognitive abilities contribute to both their responses to places and their actions within them. However, for Canter, an individual's definition of what constitutes a "place" depends on the singular perspective and perceptiveness of the person in question (Canter 1977). Because each person conceptualizes places differently,

the relevant scale for assessing places, or the "hierarchy of places," depends on the everyday experience of the user (Canter 1977). To use a hypothetical example, consider two people's experiences in a park. Person A may consider a park bench in the living room a "place" based upon their having regular experiences using it and spending time in it, while to Person B-- someone who does not use that particular bench as much--the first "place" they experience is the park itself (of which the bench is simply a component). As Canter says, "If conceptual systems are formed by identifying the people and activities to be found in a particular loci, then it is clear that the activities and people we experience in places will give rise to our conceptual systems" (Canter 1977, 150).

That cognition can have such a profound impact on an individual's experience and perception of place makes analyzing and measuring one's place attachment a difficult endeavor. Canter emphasizes that it is important to compare one's description of a place to their observable behavior within it (Canter 1977). This allows a distinction to be made between emotion-oriented accounts and the descriptions of experience of place with actual actions in places. By augmenting these accounts by observing actions within the places identified, one can get a full picture of the place being studied (Canter 1977). A method of categorizing the different types or levels of place attachment is crucial as well. Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford propose a multidimensional concept of place attachment that includes person, psychological process, and place dimensions (Scannell and Gifford 2010). This holistic framework recognizes that place attachment varies depending on who is attached (individual or collectively held meanings), psychological processes (affect, cognition and behavior), and the object in question (what is the attachment to, and what is the nature of this place). For example, while individuals may express

an attachment to a historic cultural site, they may not have individually held meaning to this particular place as a result of their personal interaction with the place, but rather that attachment is a result of collectively constructed and shared meaning of the historical relevance of that place. For this reason, many scholars argue that measuring place attachment necessarily involves analyzing narratives and stories of individuals (Williams 2014), moving through and experiencing the place in question along with research subjects (Rishbeth 2014), or even using photo-elicitation studies to literally view the place through the subject's eyes (Stedman et al 2014). Several of these methods are utilized in this research (as will be discussed later), as they allow people to understand how cognition and personal perception affect how they experience a place, and their definition of what a place is.

Place Attachment as Socio-cultural Process

Beyond the physical environment, socio-cultural processes create place attachment through the culturally specific experiences and social interactions that take place within a shared space. As mentioned before, places can be perceived differently by different groups of people based upon their cognitive abilities, memories and experiences in a physical setting. However, the "meaning" derived from a place can be culturally specific. This is demonstrated in Nasar's socio-physical model of place attachment, in which one's perception and conception of place are two different processes (Nasar 2011). While two individuals may perceive of a place the same (its physical and social qualities), their conception of the place, or the "meaning" they derive from it, can be different (Nasar 2011). For example, a group's "homeland" has its landmarks,

monuments, and shrines that speak directly to the history and culture of the people (Tuan 1977). When individuals feel attachment to a place that they have come to identify with their home and the home of their ancestors, their attachment to place can be seen as a culturally specific phenomenon (Relph 1976, Tuan 1977).

Because existential space is culturally defined, spaces can be filled with cultural significance: "rather than being comprised of physical and geological features, [the landscape] is a record of mythical history" (Relph 1976, 15). Seen as a set of social practices and norms in a shared space, culture plays an integral role in forming an individual's attachment to place. It forms part of an individual's search for a shared story or collective narrative that explains the history of the group to which one belongs (Entrikin 1991). Some studies focus on cultural processes of place attachment as systems of social reproduction and social norms that locate human relations (Altman 1992). Deborah Pellow finds that the creation of socio-spatial systems is a cultural creation that generates place attachment through social action, and is the basis for a cultural replication (Pellow 1992). For example, studies have shown how sidewalks, as sites for parades and other cultural practices, can create and commemorate cultural identities (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenreucht 2009). In her study of festivals in Valencia, Denise L. Lawrence's finds that through festivals and other cultural events, people symbolically merge a situated geography or region with its sociopolitical history, allowing people to affirm and maintain a shared cultural identity (Lawrence 1991).

Similarly, Setha M. Low sees cultural place attachment as the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional or affective meanings to a particular space

or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual's and group's understanding of and relation to the environment (Low 1992). In her definition, cultural place attachment is composed of a variety of symbolic linkages (genealogy, loss or destruction, economics, cosmology, pilgrimage, and narrative), which reflects the major components of sociocultural life--social, material, and ideological (Low 1992). However, an important distinction must be made between this and an aesthetic experience of culture. While one can experience the culture of a place and develop an evaluative judgement or attitude of it, place attachment implies a deeper bond with a place that is built up and evolves over time (Williams 2014) Combining culture and place attachment is unique from the aforementioned definitions, therefore, because it includes symbolic abstractions (such as historical narratives), and involves a process of socio-cultural learning that is developed over time.

Place Attachment and Place Identity

Until now, place attachment has been seen as an emotional link one has to a physical locality that increases through meaningful experience and is filtered through the cognitive abilities of individuals. Culture, as a set of shared practices and a sense of group belonging, affects one's experience and conception of place, and whether someone identifies with a place will impact their attachment to it. As Relph notes, attachment to place involves more than having a concern for it based upon past and future experiences, but that "there is also a real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to yourself and others" (Relph 1979, 38). In this sense, a place's identity can play an important role in the development

and maintenance of one's sense of belonging within a larger community. But how can one conceptualize or define the "identity" of a place?

In general, the identity of something refers to "a persistent sameness and unity which allows that thing to be differentiated from others" (Relph 1979, 45). This idea of place-identity has been called the "spirit of place" (genius loci), referring to its character or personality (Norberg-Shultz 1971). The spirit of a place "gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence" (Norberg-Shulz 1971, 18). Relph argues that the different identities of a place--physical settings, activities, and meanings--combine intersubjectively to form a common identity (Relph 1979). An important distinction is drawn between being "inside" and "outside" a place, the former meaning that one belongs to it and identifies with it. Insideness can exist at different levels: vicarious insideness, behavioral insideness, empathetic insideness, and existential insideness. The more profoundly someone is inside a place the more prominent role it has on their personal identity. Vicarious insideness occurs when one experiences a place in a secondhand or vicarious way without actually visiting them. Behavioral insideness refers to being in a place, seeing it as an arrangement of objects, views, and activities and using their visual patterns and structures to tell us where we are. Empathetic insideness demands not merely looking at a place, but also seeing and appreciating the essential elements of its identity, and hence to identify with it. The most fundamental form of insideness, existential insideness, means that place is experienced without deliberate reflection, in that it "characterizes belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept" (Relph 1979, 55).

With so many variables affecting place-identity, an authentic "sense of place" is defined as the ability to distinguish between the different places and identities within a place (Relph 1976). It is a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places, coming from "a full awareness of places for what they are as products of man's intentions and the meaningful settings for human activities, or from a profound and unselfconscious identity with place" (Relph 1976, 64). Having an authentic sense of place means that one is more than just inside a place, but also has a sense of belonging to a place both as an individual and as a member of a community (Relph 1979). Some scholars have operationalized the concept of place identity to understand how individuals react to physical changes to their environment (Proshansky et al 1983). Others have used it as a heuristic device to draw a distinction between place and personal identity, noting that while the two often overlap, an individual can be attached to a place but not feel that it is part of his/her identity (Hernandez et. al 2007). Missing is a nuanced exploration of how individuals existing in the same or overlapping spaces define the identity, or culture, of a place, and how they actively shape or influence it.

Place Attachment and Community Development

In recent years, scholars have sought to expand upon the foundational works on theories of place attachment, noting that scholars had been proceeding for decades with empirical studies without clarifying key concepts (Manzo and Devine-Wright 2014). From a theoretical standpoint, some argue that the aforementioned works by environmental psychologists, sociologists, and human geographers (Tuan 1974; Relph 1979, Altman 1992) took too much of a

philosophical or phenomenological approach, and thus lacked clear definitions and applications

of the concept of place attachment (Scannell and Gifford 2014). Through the construction of

multidimensional definitions, some have sought to refine our understanding of what place

attachment is (Raymond, Brown & Weber 2010; Scannell and Gifford 2010). More important for

this research is the application of concepts of place attachment to community development, or

rather, how actions and interventions by individuals can influence an entire community's sense

of place attachment. Nickolay Mihaylov and Douglas D. Perkins attempt to define a community-

level place attachment and how it can lead to collective action and the development of social

capital (2014). For them, community place attachment implies some level of agreement among

community members about what aspects of a place are important, and thus can lead to collective

action and behavior for the purposes of protecting or improving a geographic area (Miyahlob and

Perkins 2014).

In examining how local actors operationalize notions of culture for the purposes of

community development, it becomes clear that some individuals are acting based off a real sense

of belonging and ownership, or insidedness (Relph 1979), to a particular neighborhood or

community. For the purposes of this dissertation, therefore, I connect the concept of place

identity to community place attachment in order to determine not only the level of insidedness an

individual has to a particular place, but also how they engage with and intervene in their

community for the purposes of protecting their culturally held meanings of what their

neighborhood is. For example, when asked about the community means to them, individuals with

a deep level of insidedness will not only talk about specific sites or events, but describe

collectively held memories or moments tied to these places—a reflection of their identification

with both a place identity and a community. For communities with a high level of community place attachment, I expect to find a high number and concentration of individuals who express a similar sense of place and attachment. In contrast to this, individuals with a less profound sense of insidedness--oftentimes actors who don't necessarily reside in the neighborhood but feel attached to more symbolic elements of the neighborhood—will discuss feelings of attachment to historic monuments, or vague concepts such as a neighborhood's "vibrancy" or "authenticity". For the former, the place identity is collectively defined and is tied to social interaction, whereas for the latter it is about aesthetics.

In this dissertation, I explore how differing definitions of place identity influence community place attachment by interrogating the ways in which different individuals perceive of and experience the culture of their neighborhood in multiethnic, multicultural areas. In doing so, I examine how competing notions of a place's culture are used as an impetus for efforts at community development, including cultural urban revitalization strategies that seek to create new cultural communities. More importantly, I analyze how different community stakeholders collaborate and compete to shape the culture of place. To do so, this dissertation differentiates between place attachment as a sense of belonging within a larger community and attachment as a superficial feeling of "insidedness" to a physical location (how these theoretical concepts inform this dissertation's research methods will be discussed in the next section). This allows me to assess how the actions of community stakeholders are influenced by their understanding of what the community is, or rather, what aspects of the place they are attached to.

I believe this type of research will become increasingly important for the growing number of cities and urban locales characterized by ethnic diversity, natives and non-natives, and transnational or hybrid identities. Given that community development and cultural practice are inextricably linked (vis-à-vis strategies of cultural urban revitalization), planners, whether based in City Hall or within the community, must acknowledge and engage with the various identities and cultural practices of the communities they are working in. As Gupta, says, in a world where culture is no longer autonomous and geographically bounded, it is necessary to "move beyond naturalized conceptions of spatialized cultures and to explore instead the production of difference within common, shared, and connected spaces" (Gupta 1997, 45).

CHAPTER 5 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In places characterized by ethnic diversity, natives, non-natives, and transnational or hybrid identities, theories of place attachment and place identity allow us to interrogate the legitimacy of strategies of cultural urban revitalization. If cultural urban revitalization is about using culture to enhance the social and physical landscape of places, how can we be sure that these notions of culture are shared and valued by the diversity of coexisting cultures and identities within a given community?

By culture, I am referring to culturally shared traditions, symbols, norms, and values. This can include anything from family gatherings for national holidays and public art to establishing ethnic businesses and cultural institutions. In this sense, cultural practices can both be for the purposes of building local pride, as well as fostering collective action for economic benefits. In multi-ethnic areas, I expect that different community stakeholders will likely have different definitions of culture, and what they consider to be cultural assets will likely vary depending on their ethnicity, occupation, and other demographic indicators. Moreover, the proximity of multiple ethnic groups demands that different stakeholders negotiate space. With the social and physical landscape in flux, new cultural hybridities are likely to emerge. For this dissertation I also view space as a social production. The culture of a place, or place identity, therefore, is seen as "a fluid process of forming, expressing, and enforcing identities, whether these are the identities of individuals, social groups, or spatially constructed communities" (Zukin 1995, 289).

My research was driven by three research questions:

- *How do multi-ethnic communities perceive of and experience shared urban space?*

- *How are cultural assets defined in multi-ethnic communities occupying the same or overlapping neighborhoods?*

- *How are notions of the multi-ethnic neighborhood socially and historically constructed?*

To answer these questions I employed a variety of qualitative methods, including semi-structured and unstructured interviews, surveys and cognitive mapping exercises, participant observation, public space analysis, discourse analysis, and archival research, all of which occurred from June 2014 to December 2015.

Unstructured Interviews

During community events and meetings, I conducted more than fifty informal and unstructured interviews with residents. Interviewees were selected if they were a local resident or worker in Wilshire Center, and based upon their willingness and openness to answering a few questions after I explained to them my research topic. These interviews covered a range of topics, often depending on the context in which I encountered the individual. For example, I would ask a regular patron of a local restaurant about their favorite places to hang out in the area, how they have seen the neighborhood change through the perspective of the businesses' clientele, and whether they think this change is good or bad. Developers that I would meet at

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City Hall during Planning and Land Use committee hearings would chat with me about the challenges and opportunities for developing in Wilshire Center and what their vision for development in the area is. Unlike structured interviews, which were recorded, these interactions were documented with extensive field notes. On a practical level, these engagements allowed me to easily access the various immigrant populations in my study area for interviews. Many of my colleagues at the organization were also able to assist me in translation of surveys and interpretation during interviews.

Structured Interviews

I conducted a total of 43 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with community stakeholders (the interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4). Interviews took approximately 45 minutes to one hour to conduct, and were often held at a coffee shop or at the office or residence of the subject. Similar to surveys, the subjects represented a variety of community stakeholders, both internal and external to the communities being examined (see Tables 6 and 7), and thus identifying and selecting subjects was done in the same ways. However, I also selected 15-20 ethnic restaurants, supermarkets, and bars that were identified by a variety of subjects as being important assets for the community, and interviewed their proprietors and/or employees, either informally or using the interview questionnaire. During all interviews, I asked subjects to complete a brief survey cognitive mapping exercise that asked them to draw their neighborhood and mark places that are important to them (this tool is discussed in detail below). However, while often conducted together, the interview addressed

very different questions than the survey, such as: How do different individuals perceive of the community? How do people feel about ethnic diversity in their neighborhood? Do they regularly interact with individuals from other ethnic groups? Do they participate actively in local affairs? If so, in what contexts? The benefit of conducting surveys and interviews with the same respondents was that it allowed me to explore the relationship between what individuals consider to be cultural assets and their positionality (occupation and influence) in the community. The purpose here was to understand how different internal and external interests influence how culture is defined and operationalized for the purposes of cultural urban revitalization.

Given that I am examining different definitions of the neighborhood, the terms "neighborhood" and "community" are somewhat precarious. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use community and neighborhood interchangeably. In other words, when I refer to an "ethnic community", I am referring to a particular ethnic population in a specific physical location--the same is true of "ethnic neighborhood". For example, in discussing the Armenian community, I am speaking of those who identify as Armenian and live within the study area--not those who reside in LA County overall. Using these two words interchangeably prevented confusion during interviews: I intentionally did not ask Korean respondents to describe their perception of "Koreatown", or draw the boundaries of "Koreatown", but rather asked them to describe and draw the boundaries of their neighborhood and/or community. This prevented respondents from attempting to draw or describe what they believed to be the "official" boundaries of a particular neighborhood, but rather do so as they naturally perceived it.

Residents	First generation immigrant	5	
	Second/1.5 generation immigrant	5	14
	Non-ethnic new arrivals	4	
Small businesses	Ethnic small businesses	5	10
	Non-ethnic small businesses	4	
Institutional	Neighborhood Councilmembers	2	
	Ethnic CBOs	5	
	Non-ethnic CBOs	2	12
	Cultural institutions	2	
	Social/public service providers	1	
External	Public officials	2	
	Developers/real-estate brokers	3	7
	Journalists	2	
		Total:	**43**

Table 6: Individuals interviewed by stakeholder type

Ethnicity	Number
Korean	9
Guatemalan	7
Mexican	5
Salvadoran	6
Oaxacan	2
White	3

Bangladeshi	4
Thai	4
Armenian	3
Total	**43**

Table 7: Individuals interviewed by ethnicity

Surveys and Cognitive Mapping

In order to analyze how residents, business owners, and other community stakeholders experience and perceived of their neighborhood, I conducted a total of 58 structured surveys and cognitive mapping exercises (See Appendices 1-3). In order to receive a diversity of perspectives, I distributed the survey to a variety of stakeholder types (see Tables 4 and 5). The CBO I worked at was membership-based, and thus had a network of around 500 residents in my study area. During general membership meetings, I invited members to participate in interviews and surveys, which often took place at a later time at the office of the CBO. My position as a board member of the Neighborhood Council also helped me secure interviews and surveys, both with grassroots and high-level stakeholders, such as City Councilmembers and big developers. For example, local activists would often come to council meetings to discuss community concerns. And, when new developments, entitlements, or business permits were being requested within the Neighborhood Council's jurisdiction, the project's representative would be required to

make a presentation during a board meeting. After these meetings, I would often approach such individuals to conduct a survey or set up an interview (as explained below)[17].

Other subjects were selected on the street and in public places, such as parks and farmers markets, or, for business owners, at their place of business. While I did not walk into every business in the study area for interviews, I sought to select a representative sample of ethnic restaurants, supermarkets, mom-and-pop stores, as well as newer bars, restaurants, and other nightlife amenities. Some subjects, particularly those external stakeholders (e.g. developers and city officials) and institutional actors (e.g. heads of local organizations) were identified through internet searches and contacted via email and phone to arrange meetings. Lastly, after each interview or survey, I would ask subjects to refer me to a friend, family members, or coworkers, as additional subjects. This snowballing technique allowed me to build a diverse network from which to recruit subjects.

The surveys asked individuals a series of demographic questions regarding their race/ethnicity, age, income, etc., as well as the name of their neighborhood, and how long they have been living there. Then, individuals were asked to draw the boundaries of their neighborhood on a map, and mark locations where they spend time socializing with friends, go shopping, and places that they consider to be "cultural assets" of their community. These surveys allowed me to assess what different stakeholders view as the community's cultural assets, where they spend time in their neighborhood, and whether this is related to demographic characteristics.

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[17] The priority in approaching any subject was to have them participate in both an interview as well as a survey. With that said, in certain situations (such as Neighborhood Council meetings) it was more appropriate to survey a large number of individuals at once rather than trying to set up numerous interviews.

Based on these responses, I coded the different types of "cultural assets" (as defined by the interviewees), and mapped them.

Residents	First generation immigrant	8	
	Second/1.5 generation immigrant	9	25
	Non-ethnic new arrivals	8	
Small businesses	Ethnic small businesses	7	
	Non-ethnic small businesses	7	14
Institutional	Neighborhood Councilmembers	2	
	Ethnic CBOs	5	
	Non-ethnic CBOs	2	12
	Cultural institutions	2	
	Social/public service providers	1	
External	Public officials	2	
	Developers/real-estate brokers	3	7
	Journalists	2	
		Total:	**58**

Table 4: Individuals surveyed by stakeholder type

Ethnicity	**Number**
Korean	10
Guatemalan	8
Mexican	7
Salvadoran	6
Oaxacan	3

White	7
Black	3
Chinese	3
Bangladeshi	4
Thai	4
Armenian	3
Total	**58**

Table 5: Individuals surveyed by ethnicity

Participant Observation

Prior to beginning fieldwork, I lived in the study area for three-years and became active in the community. I ran and was elected as a board member to the Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council, where I also served as co-chair of the Planning and Land Use committee. As a board member, I was able to monitor developments in the neighborhood, and gain direct contact to developers for interviews. I also began volunteering twenty hours per week at a local community-based organization (CBO), called KIWA ("Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance") that provides social services to low-income immigrants in the area. I observed and participated in a variety of community events throughout my study area. At times, I was involved in organizing these events because of my role at KIWA or as a board member of the Neighborhood Council.

Public Space Analysis

Exploring my study area on foot, I used a variety of techniques to document the spatiality of social life in different spaces—from sidewalks and parks to strip malls and shopping centers. I walked every street in the study area and mapped the spatial distribution of cultural signifiers (signage, architecture, and public art). I conducted business mapping during these walks, in which I also highlighted the distribution of ethnic businesses. I relied heavily on signage for these maps--for example, businesses with identifiable ethnic names, such as "Bangla market", or words written in a native language. However, it was not always possible to differentiate between Latino/a subgroups, such as Oaxacan or Salvadoran, unless they were clearly marked. For this reason, the business maps include a general "Latino/a" category. I also spent a total of twelve hours doing public space analysis of the eight major commercial strips in the study area (Pico Blvd, 8th St, 6th St, 3rd St, Beverly Blvd, Melrose Ave, Sunset Blvd, Hollywood Blvd), which I selected for their high concentration of ethnic and small businesses, and high level of pedestrian activity. These twelve hours were spent in hour-long intervals during morning, afternoon, evening, and late-evening time periods. During the public space analysis, I took extensive field notes documenting the presence of different ethnic populations, the types of businesses they were patronizing, and how different ethnic groups used, appropriated, or changed the built environment for social, cultural, and economic activities. Specifically, I was interested in how the co-occupation of space was reflected in the built environment, and whether and how cultural hybridities (i.e. cultural exchanges or fusions) were created in this process, where are they located, and what they looked like.

At the 15-20 aforementioned restaurants I selected for interviews, I also shopped, ate, and otherwise passed time at these establishments every week throughout the course of my research. While inside, I documented the different types of patrons (age, ethnicity), their appearance (families, young professionals, workers) as well as the atmosphere more generally (i.e. Are there regular patrons of these places? Are individuals socializing with one another? How are the business employees interacting with different patrons?) Through my participant observation as a resident of the study area I was able to identify spaces shared by multiple groups, and how they relate to different boundaries--both real and imagined.

Content analysis

The qualitative data gathered during interviews was analyzed using grounded theory and informed by qualitative content analysis (Charmaz 2006; Krippendorf 2013). Every interview was recorded and transcribed (unless the subject preferred otherwise). In analyzing the text of the interview, I focused on individuals' stated perceptions of the neighborhood, and their description of how they experience the neighborhood (e.g. where they spend time, with whom, etc.). I then compared how different individuals framed their understandings of their neighborhood and the issues impacting it, and how was influenced by their own background. I also use Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford's multidimensional concept of place attachment in my discourse analysis. They operationalize person, psychological process, and place dimensions (Scannell and Gifford 2010). This holistic framework allows one to assess whether one's place attachment draws from individually or collectively held meanings, the process through which it is created (affect, cognition or behavior), and the object in question (what is the attachment to, and what is the

nature of this place). Lastly, I utilized Relph's concept of "sense of place" (1979), which refers

to the ability of individuals to distinguish between the different places and identities within a

place, and still feel a sense of belonging both as an individual and as a member of a community.

By operationalizing this concept, I investigate the extent to which different groups identify with

the neighborhood, whether that self-identification includes an awareness of the existence of other

ethnic groups and cultures, and whether individuals develop sentiments of territoriality of

particular spaces or neighborhood institutions. And, given that I am focusing on active,

community stakeholders, these narratives allow me to examine social networks within the study

area, and how groups collaborate or conflict with one another.

In talking to individuals about their interaction with the built environment, it is necessary

to also observe these interactions as well so as to understand the difference between their stated

interactions in a place, and how they internalize these behaviors. Jack L. Nasar puts forth a

model relating the socio-physical characteristics of places and human responses. In his view, an

individual responds to the social and physical characteristics of place through emotional

reactions and cognitive appraisals (Nasar 2011). David Canter similarly focuses on how people's

perceptions of place influence their actions within them. It necessitates that we try to understand

not only people's interaction with and within the physical environment, but how they perceive

and understand these inter-related processes as well (Canter 1977). For this reason, I not only ask

individuals to describe a place, but also compare it to their observable behavior within it. For

example, if a resident told me that at a particular intersection they "hang out with people from all

races and ethnicities", I would then ask to accompany them to that particular space in order to

more closely understand what they mean by "hang out", what this looks like, and what aspects of

that particular place allow for this to occur. By augmenting these accounts by observing actions within the places identified, I am able to get a full picture of the place being studied.

It is worth noting that, because the commonly conceived boundaries of "Koreatown" span much of the study area, there is significantly more discussion of this particular ethnic neighborhood during interviews and surveys. In fact, Koreatown has become the focus of recent scholarship because of its unique pattern of development and multi-ethnic population (Greif 2006, Park and Kim 2008, Yu et al 2004). While the majority of my survey data took place in this area, I purposefully expanded my interviews to areas outside of Koreatown in Central Los Angeles in order to get the perspectives of community stakeholders from other ethnic groups and neighborhoods.

Archival Research and Critical Discourse Analysis

To answer my third research question--How are notions of the multi-ethnic neighborhood socially and historically constructed--I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze how the use of language and framing in the media shaped the public's understanding of the social and cultural landscape of multi-ethnic communities. CDA, which has its roots in critical linguistics, seeks to understand how particular discourses are produced (Fowler et al 1979; Fowler 1991; Van Dijk 1993, 1996). Previous CDA scholarship has demonstrated how discourse is not simply a byproduct or reflection of social processes, but also contributes to the production of these

processes as well (Fairclough 1992). Urban planning researchers have similarly examined how the use of metaphors in policy discourse can promote particular particular agendas while marginalizing others (Coffey 2016). In this sense, the ways in which cities, neighborhoods, and communities are discussed in public platforms has a direct relationship with how policy makers evaluate the needs of certain groups. By conducting a CDA of archival news articles written about my study area, I sought to understand how multi-ethnic communities are defined and represented by the media, the city, and the public, and who ultimately benefits or is hurt by these representations.

I used CDA methods, described below, to analyze *Los Angeles Times* news articles written about Koreatown between 1979--when the first article on "Koreatown" appeared--and 2016. I chose to only search for articles mentioning Koreatown because it is the largest and most publicly recognized neighborhood in the study area, and thus I expected to receive a large number of articles. In total, I collected and analyzed 235 news articles. Using the newspaper's archives and pulling any article mentioning "Koreatown," I then selected articles that discussed in any manner the culture of the neighborhood--articles about people, places, or events related to the various ethnic groups in the area. Articles that simply reported incidents that had occurred in the neighborhood (i.e. a car accident or fire) were not selected.

After gathering the articles, I conducted a close reading of each to identify common frames through which the culture of the neighborhood was discussed--I wrote short summaries of

each article, and tried to identify recurring narratives or types of stories[18]. Once I had a bank of articles types[19], I inferred four general frames (which will be described later on) that categorize the different ways in which the neighborhood's culture is represented in the local news. From here, I conducted a second round of analysis, whereby I reread the gathered articles and coded them according to one (or more) of the four themes. This allowed recurring frames to be quantified and examined over time and in relation to historical events.

To undertake an ethnographic study of complex social phenomena, my research methods were informed by a model of "reflexive science" (Burawoy 1998, 2003). Unlike more positivist research approaches, which seek to leave the observed world undisturbed so as to have reliable, replicable, and representative data and analysis, a reflexive science takes as its starting point the fact that all knowledge is socially constructed. However, instead of embracing subjectivism outright, reflexive scientists acknowledge an "intersubjectivity" (1998) between the researcher and those being studied. This requires comprehending others and their responses through a real participation in their lives, and studying their situations as part of a social process.

Possible biases arise from the fact that my research involved developing and maintaining relationships with many of my subjects. However, throughout my fieldwork, I kept a research journal alongside my field notes, in which I took notes on how my relationship with subjects was

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[18] By frames I am referring to how the writer of the news article seemed to understand or interpret (or want the reader to understand and interpret) the content of their story. For example, articles that described incidents of crime would often then refer to the growing population of immigrants in the area, thereby implying that there is a connection between immigrant populations and growing incidents of crime. Such causal connections were merely implied in some articles, yet in others might be explicitly stated.

[19] I categorized articles based upon broad criteria during this first round of analysis. Some examples of article types are: human interest stories of immigrants, reporting on ethnic festivals, stories tying local issues to globalization, food/nightlife stories, crime reporting.

changing over time. This forced me to reflect on how my role as researcher affected the type of

data I received. In addition, because my subjects were not randomly sampled, they are not a

representative grouping of stakeholders and residents in the study area. Following the tradition

of critical sociology, my intention was not to achieve a representative sample size, but rather to

attain a level of embeddedness[20] in the field that would give access to data, otherwise

unattainable through more positivist modes of data-gathering. This understanding drove my data

analysis. However, I paid close attention to the demographics of respondents in order to ensure

there was an equal representation in terms of age, gender, and income. I also ensured that my

pool of respondents reflected the ethnic makeup of the study area. Doing so allowed me to

identify patterns between sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, and how they

perceived and experienced the culture of their community.

Another important bias is that of my own positionality as a researcher who is a white,

heterosexual male. While I drew heavily from critical sociology to reflect on how my own biases

affect my interaction with my subjects and my environment, there were inevitable barriers to

particular spaces in my study area. For example, while I spent a significant amount of time in a

variety of ethnic businesses, there are some establishments--nail salons, parlors, beauty shops,

etc.—that are much less reachable because of my gender identity. As a result, I likely

underestimate the importance and function of these spaces to a significant number of residents in

the community, because I was unable to act as a participant-observer or conduct informal

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[20] This dissertation does not claim to achieve the level of ethnographic analysis that sociologists utilizing the extended case method and grounded theory are able to through years spent in the field. With that said, critical sociology has informed the data gathering and analysis discussed here. Embeddedness, as Burawoy describes it, means recognizing the indissoluble connection between interviewer and respondent, and therefore inserting the researcher into a wider field of social relations with his or her subjects (1998).

interviews in these spaces. To help address this, I made sure to conduct structured interviews and

surveys with a representative number of gender identities in the area to help capture how these

more gendered spaces play a role to particular groups.

CHAPTER 6 - THE VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE

As mentioned in Chapter 2, up until the mid 1970s, the Chicago School tradition of human ecology dominated the discourse on how urban politics shaped the social and physical landscape. Harvey Molotch's theory of the urban growth machine (1976), largely challenged these existing theories by focusing on how local actors influence urban growth in pursuing their narrow objectives. In this sense, rather than viewing urban development as a result of natural inflows and outflows of capital and people, Molotch focuses on the agency of individuals and institutions with an emphasis on power.

Molotch explains that the local newspaper has a unique relationship to the growth machine. Unlike other institutional actors, which may have an interest in particular geographic patterns of growth, the newspaper's interest is anchored to the aggregate growth of the city (1976). As a result, the metropolitan newspaper achieves a "statesman-like attitude" to the population, and is often regarded as a community leader in weighing in on, even arbitrating, local conflicts: "the paper becomes the reformist influence, the "voice of the community"..." (1976, 316).

This section interrogates the ways in which the local paper represents "the community" in multi-ethnic areas by focusing on one diverse neighborhood, Koreatown. In doing so, it unpacks how the urban growth machine uses particular frames in its storytelling to create new opportunities for development that favor some ethnic groups over others. In this sense, the local paper is not an objective statesman to the general population, but actually contributes to the commodification of ethnic communities. At the same time, this archival research allows for a

closer examination of how, through local discourse and historic events, different notions of the neighborhood are socially constructed.

This section relies on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of 235 news articles written between 1979 and 2016 about Koreatown. It analyzes how the use of language and framing in the media shaped the public's understanding of the social and cultural landscape of multi-ethnic communities. In conducting a close reading of *Los Angeles Times* articles written about Koreatown, clear patterns of language use and representations of the community emerge. During an initial analysis of the articles gathered, I wrote short summaries of each article, and identified common narratives or story types that the *LA Times* reported on. From there, I grouped these common narratives into a typology of frames. Figure 18 below lists the recurring narratives and their frame groupings, and Figure 19 shows their occurrence over time. Each of these frames is described in turn below.

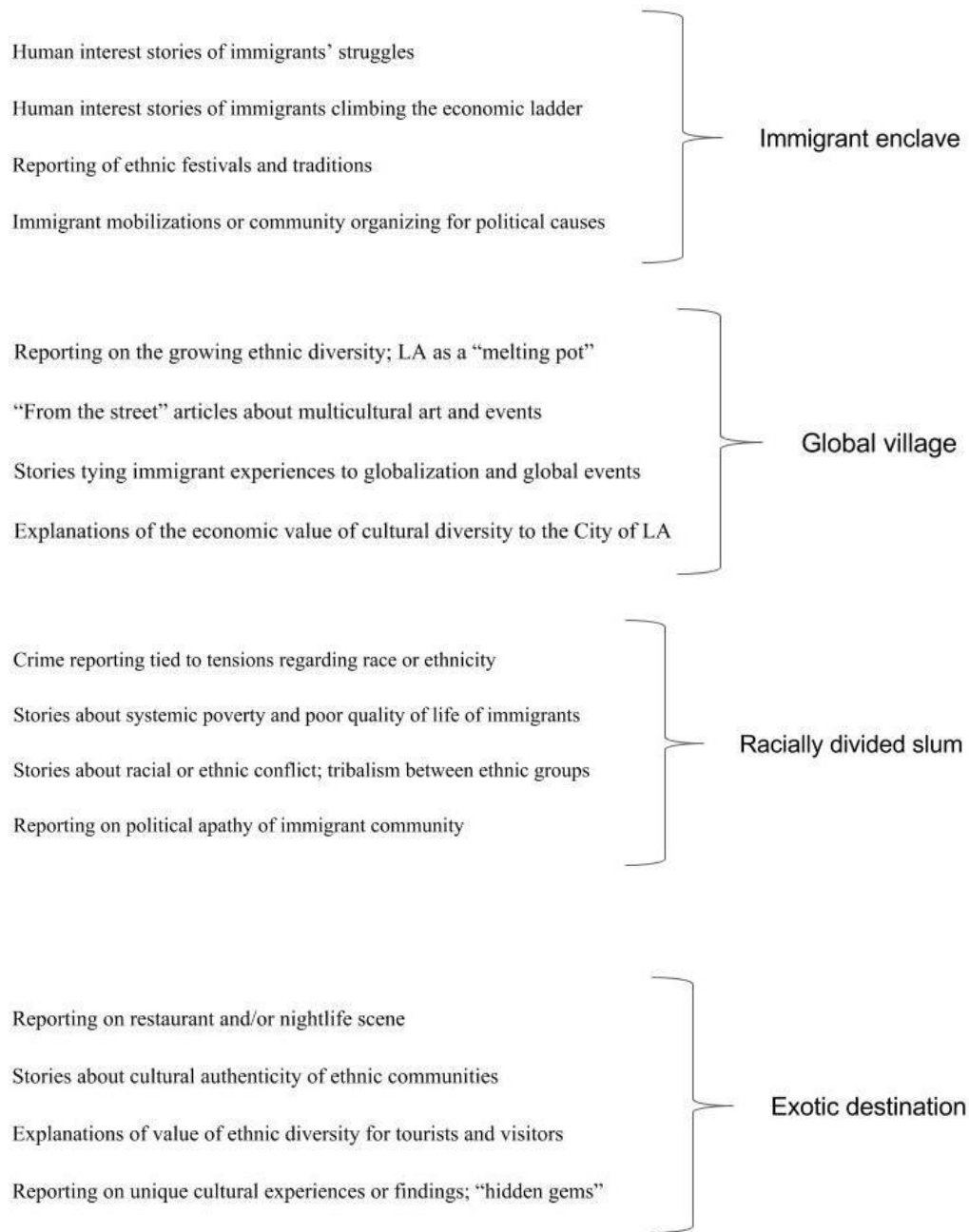**Story type**   **Frame**

Human interest stories of immigrants' struggles

Human interest stories of immigrants climbing the economic ladder

Reporting of ethnic festivals and traditions   Immigrant enclave

Immigrant mobilizations or community organizing for political causes

Reporting on the growing ethnic diversity; LA as a "melting pot"

"From the street" articles about multicultural art and events

Stories tying immigrant experiences to globalization and global events   Global village

Explanations of the economic value of cultural diversity to the City of LA

Crime reporting tied to tensions regarding race or ethnicity

Stories about systemic poverty and poor quality of life of immigrants

Stories about racial or ethnic conflict; tribalism between ethnic groups   Racially divided slum

Reporting on political apathy of immigrant community

Reporting on restaurant and/or nightlife scene

Stories about cultural authenticity of ethnic communities

Explanations of value of ethnic diversity for tourists and visitors   Exotic destination

Reporting on unique cultural experiences or findings; "hidden gems"

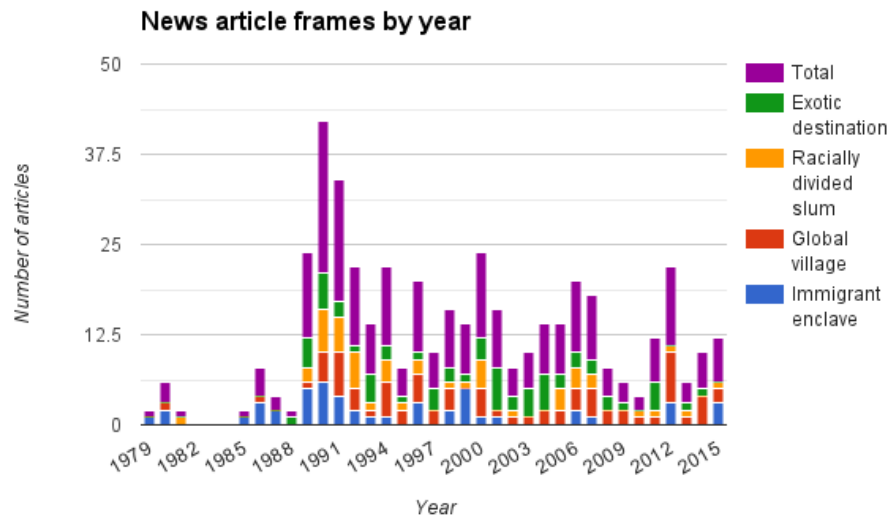Figure 18: Article types and frames

News article frames by year

Figure 19: News article frames by year

Immigrant enclave

Stories that represent Koreatown as an immigrant enclave appear as early as 1979, and appear the most frequently during this early history of the neighborhood. As mentioned earlier, it is around this time that Korean businesses began to cluster significantly around Olympic Avenue, once considered the core of the Korean community, and led to the colloquial title of "Koreatown". These "immigrant enclave" stories on Koreatown focus on the plight of immigrants and their families, as well as the successes of particular immigrant entrepreneurs. Other articles document the emergence and concentration of cultural markers that signify that particular ethnic groups are adapting the built environment for their own traditions and uses, including architecture, festivals, and the growth of ethnic markets.

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While early articles do refer to the title "Koreatown", not all stories focus on the Korean population. There is an early awareness in these news stories that this area holds immigrant groups from a variety of national backgrounds. With that said, what distinguishes this frame from others is that the culture of the community is represented as belonging to particular ethnic groups, and deriving from the host country from which they came. Moreover, these cultures are not yet explained as having any social, economic, or symbolic value to non-ethnic individuals. In other words, culture and cultural diversity are not described as commodities for consumption, but rather as the everyday experiences and practices of migrant populations, and how they are changing the urban landscape. Such is clear in the titles of the news articles themselves: "New Middle Class Emerging in City--Persevering Asians" (Meyer 1980), "Political Impact Just Beginning: Ethnic's Influence, Particularly Latino, to be Heavy (Meyer 1980b)", and "Minding their Own Businesses" (Lee 1991).

Still, while there are stories describing a number of immigrant populations in Koreatown, the majority of them focus on Koreans. Amongst those articles written specifically about the Koreans in Koreatown, one particular kind of story stands out for both its frequency and for the way in which it contributes to the public's understanding of the culture of the community: articles written about the powerful influence that successful Korean American organizations, associations, and individuals had in attracting investment, namely Korean investment. Oftentimes this money went towards new commercial structures that hold Korean-owned and operated business, such as a luxury spas, Korean beauty stores, and restaurants. In other instances, it helped fund the development of themed architectural elements, like street lamps or other sidewalk monuments commemorating Korean heroes. According to some, it is this investment that "put Koreatown on the map."

In fact, a number of articles that discuss the aspirations of other immigrant populations to establish their own neighborhood, a "Little India", or "Cambodia Town", often refer back to Koreatown as an ethnic community success story. This is not simply the words of the journalists--many interviewees are quoted expressing similar feelings: "They have Chinatown, Koreatown...we've been living here for a long time. We deserve this" (Gorman 2007). What these articles demonstrate is that, even before neighborhood designation became an official policy of the city, the public equated an immigrant population's success with their ability to receive public recognition for their own neighborhood, and especially, neighborhood growth. However, it is not the mere presence of immigrants that engenders this--if this was the case, many more Mexican or Central American communities would be given names reflecting their ethnic origin. Instead, what makes these "neighborhoods" recognizable is the high concentration, and rapid clustering of businesses that are simultaneously ethnically owned, operated, and, sometimes, architecturally themed. Such is evident by the first LA Times article where "Koreatown" is mentioned. The article, titled "Koreans Take to Street Armed With Brooms", appeared in August of 1979, and told the story of a number of shop owners and residents who held a community clean up. It states:

> "Koreatown--the name derived from Chinatown--extends east to west from Alvarado St. to Crenshaw Blvd, and north to south from 3rd St. to Pico Blvd. Actually only a third of the residents in the area are of Korean descent, but they have put their stamp on the neighborhood with about 600 shops opened in the last half-dozen years" (Michaelson 1979).

Although it is unknown by whom or how the name Koreatown was first coined, these articles reveal the social construction of norms and values for how *successful* ethnic communities should

look and feel. Within the context of Los Angeles, Koreatown, like Chinatown and Little Tokyo,

succeeded not because of the dominant presence of a particular immigrant group, but because of

how such group shaped the physical and social environment as seen from the street:

> "Once a dusty row of storefronts in an aging commercial district, it is becoming a
> lively annex of Koreatown...signs printed in Korean characters hang in nearly every
> portal, and Korean-language billboards dominate the low rooftops" (Ramsay 1991).

As will be shown later, the media's favoring of physical markers of ethnic cultures and

populations feed into the ways in which these communities--and the individuals and

organizations that come out of them or come to represent them--prioritize efforts at community

development.

Global Village

Starting in the late 1980s, there is a sudden increase in articles focusing on the

multiculturalism of Los Angeles, with journalists paying particular attention to emerging

communities where individuals from various countries around the world live in close proximity

to one another. This "global village" frame perceives such multi-ethnic enclaves as "melting

pots" of culture, often tied to the changing global economy. As one journalist quoted, "Los

Angeles is the new Ellis Island...you can take a trip around the world without leaving Los

Angeles County" (Larsen 1986). Along with this comes the public's growing taste for cultural

products and experiences, part of a new, cosmopolitan ideal that encourages urbanites to be a

tourist in their own city (Binnie et al 2006).

The global village frame sees Los Angeles' growing diversity as a sign of its success as a globally competitive city and a tourist destination. Articles with titles such as "Kenmore Avenue: A Mini Melting Pot" (Hernandez 1990) and "Exploding Ethnic Populations Change Face of LA" (Meyer 1980c) celebrate Los Angeles' new residents' impacts on the sights and sounds of the City. While they do draw from demographic and economic statistics, their visual interpretations of "the community" are the most resonant. In describing one street the runs from Koreatown to East Hollywood, one author states:

> Here, where the four corners of the world rub shoulders, newcomers from Guatemala and Thailand live next door to more established Filipino, Chinese, and Mexican immigrants. They initially eye each other with suspicion...Over time, however, fear slowly gives way to mutual trust, as neighbors watch each other's children grow and trade a 'good morning' over back-yard fences" (Hernandez 1990).

As with others, this article praises the successes of the global village by identifying inspiring anecdotes: racially mixed children playing in the street, Latino families eating in Asian restaurants, a Korean grocer speaking broken Spanish to customers, etc. Stories about street artists creating murals that depict racial harmony, as in "'The Living City Mural' Modestly Claims all of LA County as its Subject" (Polhemus 1991), or "Koreatown Mural Evolves into Neighborly Project" (Berestein 1994), similarly paint positive images of diversity in the community.

Despite the sometimes superficial scope of the LA Times' journalism, Koreatown is often presented as a shining example of how overlapping immigrant populations not only coexist, but also intermix. As has been shown, the high number and concentration of small businesses

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(primarily Korean, but also Latino) and low-wage immigrant workers matched a high demand

for cheap, unskilled labor with the necessary supply (Sanchez et al 2012). As the *LA Times* news

desk discovered, this meant that in many restaurants and grocery stores in Koreatown, the

workers were forced to learn how to communicate in order to work with one another. The *Times'*

romanticization of interethnic relations persists:

> "It is a community where a Latino stock clerk might sing along with the radio in perfect
> Korean, where dozens of Korean immigrant merchants learn Spanish before English, and
> where young immigrants born half a world apart secretly admire each other and,
> sometimes, fall in love." (Fears 1998)

And yet, there are also stories that document the real challenges and opportunities that

diversity poses to serving community needs. For example, several stories about the on-the-

ground impacts of diversity on the public school system and local church congregations provide

a deglamorized exploration of the multi-ethnic community, such as in "Students Learn the Truth

About Each Other" (Kang 1999), "Church's Bilingual Services have an Unusual Twist" (ibid

2004), and "Afterschool Center Serves Diverse Clientele" (ibid 2007).

Unlike the immigrant enclave frame, which viewed ethnic culture as belonging to the

community, these stories document the public's growing recognition of cultural diversity as a

laudable economic achievement of the City. From art exhibitions on immigrant communities to

grassroots coalitions seeking to promote "urban neighborhoods of the real Los Angeles" (LA

Times 2000), there is a growing desire amongst public, private, and community groups to open

up those parts of the city that were previously deemed inaccessible to new visitors, or "the

mainstream". In one op-ed article written by a White resident of Koreatown, the author attempts

to break what she sees as unfair stereotypes of an immigrant neighborhood as being dangerous

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and dilapidated by claiming it is "webbed with poetry, charm, and high society" (King 1997). In

reporting on the subtle pleasantries of her community, the author still manages to exoticize the

presence of crime and the lifestyles of the working-class:

> "I live in Koreatown, which is infested with gangs, teeming with street vendors and overrun with children...I have the most fun-loving neighbors imaginable. They set up makeshift bazaars on the sidewalk. They haul out a couple of tables and sell carpet sweepers, swamp coolers, telephones. They hang used-clothing displays from security fences."

Such perceptions of the community are the subject of critique from Neil Smith, who

argues that this "urban pioneer" mentality, which reinterprets working class neighborhoods as

playgrounds for middle-class urban fantasies, engenders widespread gentrification. As several

scholars note, emerging lifestyle trends encouraged the migration of young suburbanites to the

inner city in search of urban "grit" and "authenticity" (Lloyd 2010, Zukin 2011). In 1995, a

coalition of business owners, labor leaders, and artists created the Tourism Industry

Development Council specifically to feed this growing appetite. As the *LA Times* notes:

> The coalition has challenged the local tourism industry to undo some of the damage to the city's image by promoting the sights, sounds and tastes in the urban neighborhoods of the "real" Los Angeles. Such a move, the group says, could dispel negative stereotypes while drawing some of the tourist money that flows into Los Angeles--$9.5 billion last year--into communities that have until now missed out on much of the action.

From promoting the historic "jazz scene" in African American communities, to the unique

cultural identities of neighborhoods like Koreatown and East Los Angeles, the Council was one

of the first groups to actively package L.A.'s diversity into consumable images and experiences.

Within Koreatown specifically, many local groups, such as the Korean American Chamber of

Commerce and Korean Churches for Community Development would later mobilize resources

for the purposes of creating Koreatown maps, "Welcome to Koreatown" signs, as well as themed architecture. According to them, such attractions break through a negative insularity that "keeps Koreatown an unknown territory for outsiders" (Kang 2003).

These branding actions by Korean activists, entrepreneurs, property owners, and other local boosters represent other actors in the urban growth machine (Molotch 1976). As Molotch argues, such growth coalitions participate in local political affairs that intensify and concentrate particular land uses in a given area because of their common economic interest. However, while their work is often presented as benefitting the community (or creating an identity), the benefits accrued from these efforts are distributed amongst the community. In an article written in 2002, the newfound desirability of Koreatown amongst outsiders was brought into question as to how it negatively impacts low-income residents. In the article "Blossoming Bohemia: Lured by good rents and a kinky nightlife, artsy types are moving to Koreatown, but low-income residents are being forced out" (Piccalo 2002), the writer explains that cheap rent and historic architecture has lured many creative types, primarily white, to the neighborhood. Several successful Korean businessmen and developers speak favorably about these changes "as good for business", though they don't actually reside in the community. Instead, the predominantly low-income Latino residents feel the pressure of rising rents and the discriminatory practices of landlords.

As notions of culture, and specifically a neighborhood's culture, become recognized as economic assets, particular local actors gain considerable power in shaping the social and physical landscape of the area. However, as the *LA Times* articles demonstrate, while they may share the ethnic identity of the place in question (in this case, Korean), they do not represent the residents of the community. In this sense, the exchange value of ethnically branded

neighborhoods pits the growth machine against the actual residents, who may or may not align with the perceived identity of the place. By reframing Koreatown as a global village, where one can experience foreign cultures in their own backyard, this branded culture of the neighborhood is prioritized over the everyday culture of its residents. Perhaps more importantly, this representation of the community has the potential of distracting from the fact that many residents lack basic services and amenities. As the public's attention is drawn to the cultural offerings of a place, they ignore the systemic inequalities that lock people into poverty, and that may not be necessarily place-based.

Divided Slum

While the global village frame represents the proximity of different groups through stories of intercultural dialogue and community building, the divided slum frame describes the negative outcomes of neighborhood diversity. As with much of Central Los Angeles in the 1980s, Koreatown was a predominantly low-income community of color and faced a slew of challenges that such areas struggle with, including violent crime, slumlords, and juvenile delinquency. However, because Koreatown has historically been a highly ethnically diverse area, the local media, as well as the LAPD, have interpreted many of these issues as being tied to racial tension and discrimination in the community. The divided slum frame, therefore, depicts an inner city gateway community in which getting out—or rather, integrating oneself into mainstream culture and moving into a nicer neighborhood--is a sign of upward mobility. At the same time, articles in this frame also tie poverty and political apathy to cultural and linguistic barriers. In this sense, gaining a voice and economic stability requires integrating into Western

society and becoming Americanized. Viewed with this lens, the public sees the multiethnic neighborhood as a place that needs to be both escaped from, and saved--through redevelopment.

Several types of stories dominate this frame. There are numerous articles about City departments and agencies, as well as local non-profit organizations, providing social services, leading economic development programs, and other initiatives to assist or otherwise improve the lives of residents in Koreatown. Others document the poor conditions of the neighborhood: slum decay, overcrowded schools, crime, poverty, and homelessness. However, as mentioned, these conditions are in some way tied to the ethnic diversity of the community. This is not to say that they are causal connections (i.e. that diversity is causing crime), yet by providing such contextual details as the language differences between criminal and victim, or racial tension in school districts, these articles suggest that an important relationship exists.

One of the more frequently discussed issues is around housing biases. Various articles describe landlords in Koreatown and surrounding neighborhoods discriminating against potential tenants based upon their race or ethnicity, which is a violation of California and federal laws. In fact, according to a spot-check audit conducted by the Hollywood/Mid-Los Angeles Fair Housing Council in 1988 and 1989, in which researchers submitted test applications marked as being sent by individuals of various races to apartment vacancies throughout the City, Koreatown registered the second highest percentage of racial discrimination. The *LA Times* speculated that this was also due to racial biases that arise when individuals from different backgrounds are placed in close proximity of one another:

"This mix is not always a happy one. Local authorities have noted higher numbers of hate

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crimes, with all groups represented among both victims and perpetrators. Strains have developed as Latinos moved into neighborhoods that were once largely black and as Asians have moved into communities that were once largely Anglo and Latino. Black customers have picketed Korean market owners. Clashes between Asians and Latinos and between blacks and Latinos are brewing in the political arena too. So perhaps over housing should come as no surprise" (Pastnernak 1991)

According to immigrant activists interviewed in the article, such discrimination, which is in this case by Korean landlords against non-Korean applicants, is typical amongst immigrant landlords and is likely also due to ignorance of fair housing laws in the host country.

Articles also explore poor working conditions as a phenomenon related to ethnic diversity. Numerous stories about wage theft--when an employee does not pay workers the wages they are rightfully owed for work they have performed--are presented in the racially tense slum frame. This appears predominantly in the early 2000s, shortly after the non-profit organization KIWA (known back then as the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates) became active in a number of high-profile campaigns: "Ex workers' suit seeks back wages at Korean Soup Restaurant" (Kang 1998), "Koreatown Restaurant Suit Seeks Back Overtime" (Cuza 2000), and "Restaurants Violating Labor Laws, Study Says" (McDonnell 2000). As a social justice organization, KIWA organized and fought for the rights of low-wage immigrant workers, many of whom were repeated victims of wage theft. Similar to the issues of housing bias, some immigrant entrepreneurs were unfamiliar with California labor laws regarding meal breaks and overtime, resulting in stolen wages. However, there are various instances of bad apple employers who take advantage of their workers' undocumented status by paying them whatever they

want.[21] Diversity--which the global village frame glosses over, or perhaps romanticizes--is presented here as a contributor to social conflict, even poverty.

Another frequently cited issue in Koreatown is the lack of a unified, community voice and the relationship that this has to broader race relations. Many articles document the struggle amongst immigrant populations to engage in local affairs because of linguistic or cultural divides. In some instances, this leads to a distrust between residents and the police ("Focus Shifts from Economy to Police", "LAPD Fights Fear of Police in Koreatown"), and in others it creates tensions between neighboring immigrant populations ("Asian American Coalitions Seek to Forge Unity", "Mutual Disregard is Destroying Los Angeles"). In more rare cases, these cultural barriers lead to crime, even murder (Ferrell 2000). To address this, a coalition of local groups and organizations (both Korean and non-Korean) helped raise funds in order to open a new police station in the neighborhood, and advocated for efforts creating a police force that better represents the diversity of the community (Hong 1995).

Regarding race and crime, articles within this frame are shaped significantly by the 1992 civil unrest in the wake of the Rodney King verdict. Images of the clashes between primarily African American rioters and Korean business owners were widely distributed in local, as well as national media channels, raising public concerns about the nature of race relations in diverse Los Angeles. As can be expected, there is a sudden spike in the number of articles written around 1992 in this frame, as well as others. In a sense, Koreatown, becomes the inspiration for conversation and debate around race in the City of Los Angeles. Several *LA Times* articles, as

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[21] As will be discussed later, KIWA's more recent work has sought to address this issue by not only advocating for workers' rights, but also by building multi-ethnic coalitions between Korean and Latino/a workers and employers.

well as op-ed pieces, argue (or warn) that the riot may have signaled the demise of the dream of multiculturalism, as in "The Riot is the Ugly Other Side of America" (Kwon 1992), "Mutual Disregard is Destroying Los Angeles" (Marquis 1996), and "Outside the Ethnic box, tribalism has backfired" (Marks 2000). As one author states: "North America is racially segregated. They [ethnic groups] are really separate worlds, so this is not a melting pot. It's a mosaic, a very loose mosaic that's a poor work of art" (Kwon 1992).

This frame is inextricably tied to the final frame, the "exotic destination", in that together they help construct a "landscape of happy violence" (Smith 1996), in which social ills, such a poverty and crime, as well as ethnic diversity, are seen as desirable aspects of an gritty, urban experience to a gentrifying elite. Thus the local media, as a player in the urban growth machine, plays a crucial role in painting this picture for potential newcomers to the inner city. In order to generate an appetite amongst the larger forces of gentrification, such as real estate brokers and developers, these stories of crime and destitute conditions in the multi-ethnic neighborhood are accompanied by stories of the hidden secrets of the area: restaurants, bars, and other cultural amenities that are available to only those daring enough to look.

Exotic Destination

The final frame is that of the exotic destination, in which the multi-ethnic neighborhood is cast a place to be explored and discovered and where unique cultural experiences are available to the daring visitor. These stories are representative of a larger cultural shift whereby urban newcomers, mainly the white upper-middle class, demand unique and authentic commodities and

experiences in a growing cultural economy (Zukin 2010). According to Zukin, something is considered authentic when it has clear and unique *origins*, such as traditional ethnic cuisines and working class histories, or *new beginnings*, often represented by the creation of new sidewalk cafes, refurbished lofts, and other commodified urban spaces. For the *LA Times*, this is often played out in reviews of ethnic restaurants, as well as journalistic reporting on seemingly exotic spatial experiences in areas dominated by immigrants.

In describing Koreatown, articles in this frame appear in the late 1980s from food writers. From the beginning, the writers aim to entice their readers by claiming to have discovered "original" and "exotic" dishes that are in seemingly hard-to-reach places. Because the restaurant signs and menus may lack English translation (especially those in Korean), some articles attempt to instruct the reader on how best carry themselves as an ignorant outsider to ethnic cuisine, such as in "Korean 101" (Gold 1990). At times, the writer is literally instructing the reader:

> "What you eat in a Korean tofu restaurant: tofu. Also rice and a couple different kinds of kimchee...the thing to drink here is chilled barley tea served in soup bowls, which is very refreshing and is included in the price of the lunch." (Gold 1991)

The writers can also seem ignorant themselves: "To Koreans, red pepper must be as basic as salt..." (Hansen 1989). Almost always, the writers emphasize the secretness, or exoticism, of the place they are visiting: "...amid the babble of mysterious signs..." (Blandford 1991), "...tucked away on the second story…" (Lee 1990), "...in a shopping center on the far eastern fringe..." (Hansen 1989b). Taken together, the core of this frame is in the relationship between the writer and the place: the writer presents himself or herself as a pioneer exploring uncharted territories, and the place is presented as a foreign land.

A key figure in this framing of Los Angeles, specifically with regards to food and dining, is *LA Times* journalist Jonathan Gold. In fact, in his column, Counter Intelligence, Gold actively sought out lesser known ethnic cuisines and dishes across LA County. Nearly a decade of articles were then compiled and released in a book, titled *Counter Intelligence: Where to Eat in the Real Los Angeles* (2000). Gold asserts that his writing was meant to celebrate the diverse cultures of Los Angeles, and to inspire Angelenos to appreciate them through food. With his writing about Koreatown, Gold pays particular attention to exploring the cuisines of overlapping immigrant communities, in recognition that this neighborhood is not simply "Korean" ("In the Middle of Koreatown, Great Chinese", "Ole Mole", "Viva la Brasa"). With that said, Gold's fondness for Korean food is widely documented, and culminated in an a 2005 article in *LA Weekly* (a weekly publication for which he also wrote) titled "Koreatown's Top 40" (Gold 2004), which was later updated in 2012, as "Jonathan Gold's 60 Korean dishes that every Angeleno should know" (Gold 2012). In describing Koreatown, Gold says:

> "...home to a reputed 850 places to eat and drink, as well as scores of nightclubs, coffeehouses, billiard parlors, supermarkets and bookstores, Koreatown has matured into one of the great nightlife districts in the world, a veritable restaurant paradise shoehorned right into Los Angeles' urban core" (2012).

Gold's rise to near celebrity status as a food writer and cultural critic has granted his food writing with real economic power in attracting visitors to Koreatown. Many restaurant owners have indicated that, after he published a review of their restaurant, their revenue more than doubled (Becker and Gabbert 2015). While other *LA Times* food writers may not have the same individual impact, they participated equally in the documentation of the City's ethnic cuisine. In 2001, the newspaper launched a series called "Authentic Ethnic" that would feature restaurant reviews from a handful of writers and critics.

By 2001, the number of articles in this frame had increased significantly, as articles appeared not only describing the exotic food scene of the Koreatown area, but its "unique" nightlife amenities as well, from karaoke and 24 hours spas to karaoke and "booking" clubs[22]. In some instances, orientalism dominates the narrative:

> "But Southern Californians can experience many grooming and beauty rituals, some of which have yet to be 'discovered' by posh Westside salons, in settings that evoke their origins -- our thriving ethnic communities where the treatments are part of the social and spiritual fabric. Neighborhood spas throughout the city offer steam baths, saunas and scrubs that remain virtually unchanged after import." (Valli 2005)

Words like "spiritual", or "enchanted" describing the aisles of ethnic supermarkets (Hansen 2005), serve to not only help sell these products and services (through unabashed orientalism), but to treat immigrant communities as experiential commodities in the cultural economy. In other words, to travel across the city to Koreatown and visit an ethnic supermarket, walk through the aisles and purchase an imported food product, is to have a unique, authentic experience.

As mentioned, there are certainly benefits to the increased attention by outsiders to ethnic small businesses. On the one hand, the food writing of Gold and others succeed on an anthropological level: they provide a window into the microcultures of Los Angeles' immigrant communities, which feeds into the new tastes and preferences of urbanites. However, these stories also succeed in packaging culture into consumable experiences for a decidedly *outsider* group of individuals. The benefits of this are clear—new outsiders spend money at local

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[22] Booking is practice akin to speed dating that occurs in some Korean clubs: groups of male friends will sit it tables and purchase alcohol and food. Then, club employees will take women from table to table, where they sit and socialize with the men until they decide that they are either uninterested, and therefore leave to go to another table, or are interested and remain at a table.

restaurants and businesses and inject new activity into the local economy. With that said, food writers that encourage cultural tourism through their reporting have real economic and social influence over the communities they are writing about, and there are power dynamics inherent to their relationship and the relationship of their readers with the places they visit and eat in. They are a part of the same urban growth machine that sparks gentrification. To dine locally is one thing, but how might these same outsiders support the community in other ways? Those spaces in the community that do not or cannot be reviewed by cultural critics, or are not praised by media reporters as being culturally important, are ignored, and likely become the first targets for urban redevelopment.

Framing the Multi-ethnic Neighborhood

The ways in which these articles frame the social, cultural, and economic realities of Koreatown demonstrates the power that the local media has in both justifying and engendering neighborhood change. The *immigrant enclave* frame defines what it means for an ethnic population to build a successful ethnic neighborhood, by emphasizing the clustering of ethnic businesses and the theming or branding of a place in order to attract visitors. By casting the area as a *global* village, the local media helps package the diverse array of immigrant communities into consumable experiences for the cosmopolitan urbanite. The focus on crime, poverty, and racial strife in the *divided slum* frame documents the negative outcomes of private and public disinvestment. At the same time, it helps construct the image of the gritty urban core, an increasingly attractive place for incoming suburbanites with a taste for the urban "frontier" (Smith 1996). This frame helps incite the next, in which the multi-ethnic neighborhood is

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described as an *exotic destination*. In this portrayal, stories about the area's exotic restaurants and hidden bars and nightclubs dominate. While perhaps seeking to celebrate the area's authentic cultural amenities, they also succeed in casting urban spaces as uncharted territories ripe for discovery by wealthy, "westside" pioneers. These frames diverge and interact in complex ways. Rather than advance one voice of the community, as Molotch purports, the local media has the capacity to present multiple voices: that of the immigrant entrepreneur, the food critic, the police officer, the cosmopolitan consumer. It is the appropriation of various voices that allow for numerous conversations with different players in the urban growth machine.

While these frames are produced and perpetuated by the local media, the scale of their impact is much greater. For the LA Times' local readership, this ability to frame and reframe particular neighborhoods and locales produces an intra city image that either attracts or deters local residents or entrepreneurs from entering the area, often from other neighborhood or areas in Los Angeles County. However, for the newspapers' national or international readers, these frames may produce a multiplier effect, as other online newspapers or blogs post summaries or recaps of LA Times articles, further circulating these frames to a wider audience. For example, for a widely renowned and respected food journalist such as Jonathan Gold to say that Koreatown has become one of the "great nightlife districts of the world" will surely catch the attention of investors and urban professionals in other parts of the world seeking new destinations for their economic or cultural exploits. That the New York Times recently reported on Koreatown in their popular weekend guide, titled "36 Hours in Koreatown, Los Angeles", is evidence of a ripple effect created by these frames. Rather than appeal to Angeleno/as, this article seeks to attract a decidedly New York City sensibility:

"As the most densely packed part of Los Angeles, it's also one of the city's most strollable, with Art Deco buildings and palm-lined boulevards. With the influence of three generations of Korean and Latino immigrants, these once-mean streets have become a picturesque and prosperous "Blade Runner"-ish warren of ethnic culinary hot spots imbued with an East-meets-West sense of fun." (Jone 2015).

One can imagine an East Coast resident planning their next vacation to consider staying or at least stopping by in this newly "discovered" cultural hub. As mentioned, the effects of this growing attention can be both good and bad for local residents and business. However, when the eye of the beholder belongs not to a vacationer, but an international real-estate fund or developer, the potential for these frames to bring neighborhood changes that are out of scale with the needs and wants of local residents is much greater.

CHAPTER 7 - DEFINING AND LOCATING CULTURE

While the previous section sought to understand the "view from the outside" of the multi-

ethnic neighborhood, as indicated by articles in the LA Times, this section explores how

residents and workers within the area define their community, both in terms of geography as well

as notions of culture. Interview and survey data revealed a diversity of ways in which community

stakeholders perceive of and experience the culture of their neighborhood. In the survey tool (see

Appendix 2), respondents were asked to do four tasks: 1) draw the boundaries of their

neighborhood and give it a name; 2) locate on the map places they consider to be cultural assets

of their neighborhood; 3) locate on the map places where they socialize in the neighborhood; and

4) locate places where they go shopping. The latter two questions aim to discern where in the

area residents spend their time, the first two questions seek to understand how they perceive their

neighborhood in terms of geography and notions of culture. After coding the data, I created a

categorized list of the different types of cultural assets claimed by the respondents, as well as the

frequency with which they were mentioned (percentages of respondents referring to them).

These assets are listed below in Table 8.

Cultural Assets	Frequency mentioned
1 - Ethnic supermarkets	98%
2 - Ethnic small businesses	96%
3 - Community organizations	20%
4 - Themed architecture and public art	18%

5 - Nightlife amenities	16%
6 - Cultural/historic landmarks	12%
7 - Cultural festivals and events	10%

Table 8: Types of cultural assets

In analyzing the data around respondents' demographic and occupational indicators, as well as their positionality within the neighborhood, several relationships emerged.

First, there is a strong relationship based upon age--young, 1.5 and second-generation immigrant respondents (ages 18 - 29) and non-ethnic residents chose nightlife amenities and cultural/historic landmarks as important cultural assets. Such can easily be explained by the fact that younger groups, including students and young urban professionals, often choose where to live based upon presence of bars, clubs, and performing arts venues (Florida 2002). The fact that external actors, namely developers and real-estate brokers, also chose nightlife amenities and cultural/historic landmarks as key cultural assets of the area illustrates the marriage between these two groups' respective interests. As many scholars have noted, developers capitalize on the fact that young urban residents, seeking exciting, authentic urban experiences, are increasingly occupying inner-city neighborhoods (Zukin 1982, 2011; Lloyd 2010). What is more interesting, is the fact that second generation immigrants, many of whom grew up in the area now being sought after by an emerging gentry, exhibit the same tastes and preferences.

There is also a strong relationship between how individuals defined their neighborhood and their level of engagement in the community. Those who are very involved with community

affairs--including activists, teachers, members of the Neighborhood Council, and employees at local community organizations and social service providers--all chose cultural festivals and events, themed architecture and public art, and community organizations as the most important cultural assets of the area. As will be discussed later, this is due to the fact that, as active members of the community, many of these respondents are involved in the planning and production of various cultural events in the area, be it a parade or holiday celebration. And, ethnic leaders of business associations, many of whom are also second-generation immigrants, are responsible for a lot of the themed architecture and development.

The most frequently chosen cultural assets by all respondents were ethnic supermarkets and ethnic small businesses. These were selected by co-ethnics across age, generation, and income levels. In Wilshire Center there is a particularly high concentration of ethnic supermarkets compared to other ethnic communities in Los Angeles. Image 11 shows a clustering of Oaxacan small business along Pico Blvd. In addition to small Latino/a, Bangladeshi, and Thai grocers, there are eight large Korean shopping centers (see Image 12).

Image 11: Clustering of Oaxacan small businesses in Wilshire Center, Source: Google Earth

There are eight such shopping centers in Koreatown, many of which often include Korean-owned businesses in addition to supermarkets. These shopping centers had the most diverse array of patrons from across ethnic groups, likely a result of their size and central locations. Most importantly, the cognitive mapping exercises revealed that the locations of ethnic supermarkets and ethnic business clusters dictate where individuals spend the most time socializing, shopping, and recreating in the neighborhood (see Figure 20).
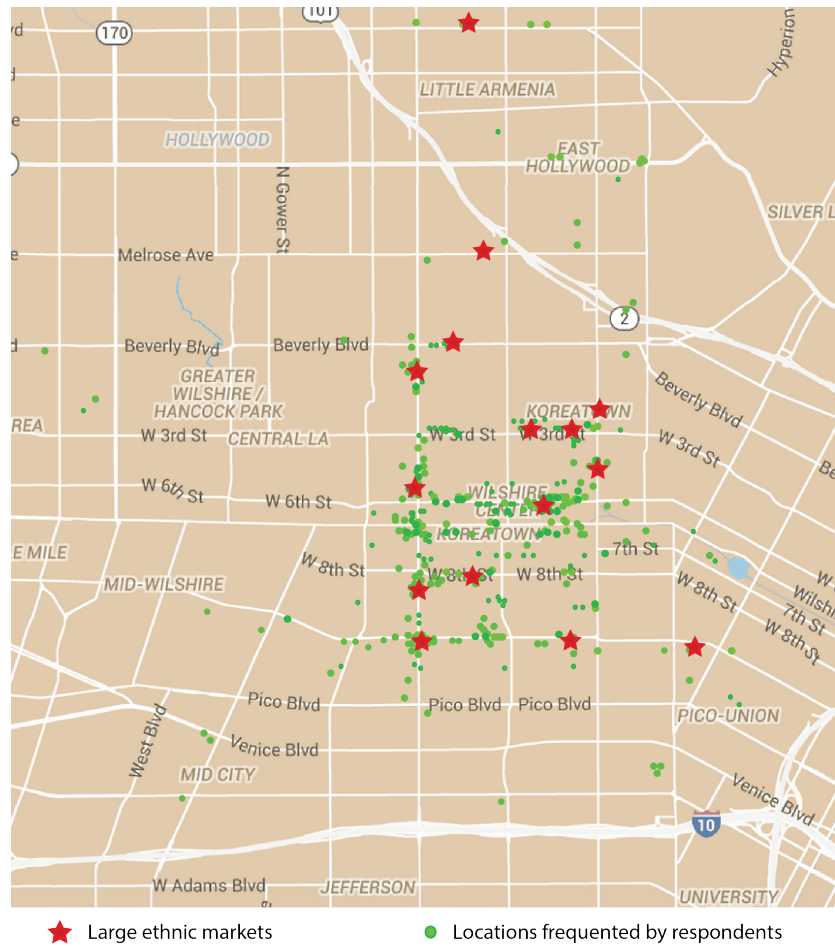
Figure 20: Locations of ethnic markets in relation to locations frequented by respondents (across all ethnic groups).

This does not mean that only Korean residents/workers were found near Korean restaurants, and only Latina/o residents/workers were found near Latina/o restaurants. As discussed in a previous section, individuals across these ethnic categories often work together at the same restaurants.

Image 12: Koreatown Galleria in Koreatown, Source: Google Earth

Field observations confirmed that there is a high level of cohabitation of space across ethnic groups along commercial corridors where these is a large concentration of ethnic business and markets. For example, in the aforementioned case study of 3rd St and Beverly, one can see a strong clustering of ethnic small businesses. In these areas, you will also find the greatest number and diversity of ethnic groups eating and shopping in common areas. This does not mean that there needs to be a diversity of ethnic small businesses (i.e. Thai businesses next to Korean businesses, next to Oaxacan businesses, etc.) in order too attract a mix of users in these spaces. Instead, where there is a high presence of ethnic small businesses *in general*, regardless of which ethnicity they belong or cater to, there are also numerous co-ethnic users. For example, in the second case study described below of Olympic Blvd and 8th St (Figure 21), one can see that this portion of the study area is dominated by Korean businesses, with some clustering of Latina/o owned businesses on 8th Street and Vermont Ave.

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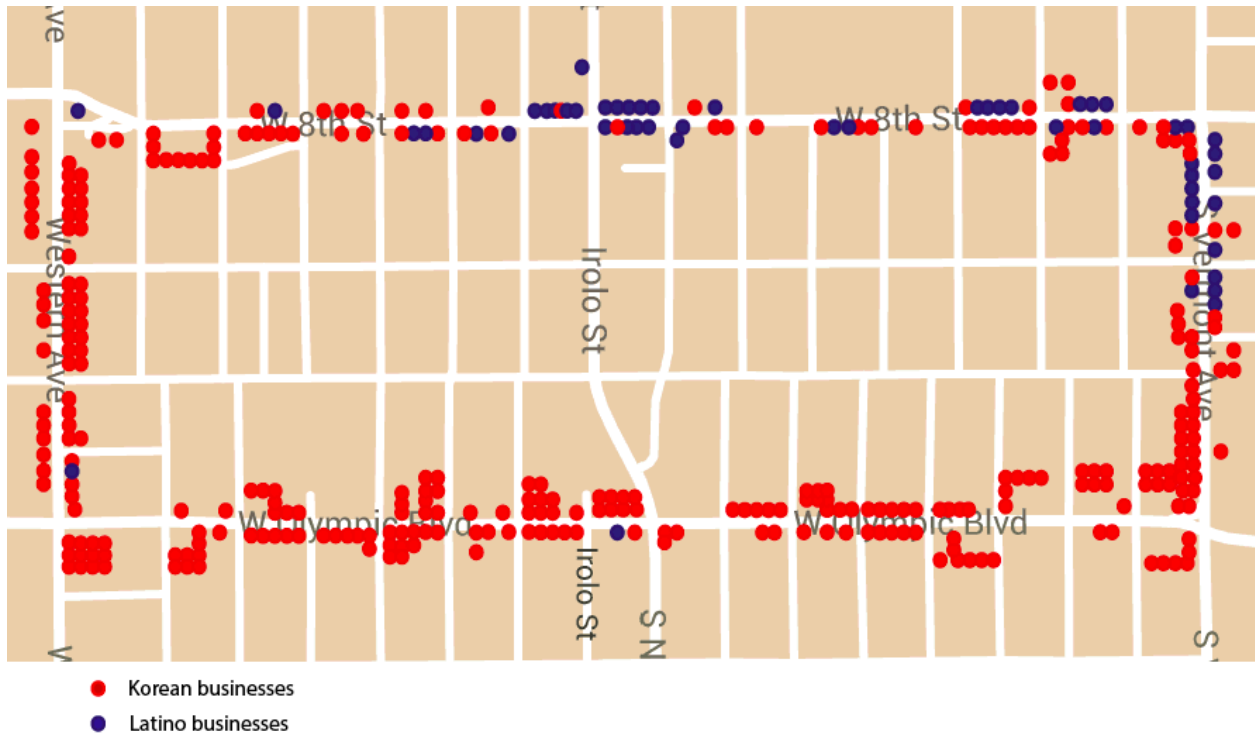
Figure 21: Case study of ethnic business clusters in southern portion of study area.

This is also where, according to researchers, "Koreatown" first began (Light 2002, Min 1984, Min and Bozorgmehr 2000, Park and Kim 2008, Yu et al 2004). With that said, Olympic Blvd is a highly diverse space in terms of its users. As will be discussed later, this is perhaps best explained by the fact that ethnic small businesses in the study area employ a variety of co-ethnics, thereby bringing together workers from across different backgrounds.

Survey responses confirm what was observed in the field. As shown in Figure 22, there is a lot of overlap between where Korean and Latino/a respondents reported spending significant time in the neighborhood (as described in the survey, either "shopping" or "socializing") and where there are high concentrations of ethnic small businesses and markets. This is likely due to

the fact that these residential populations overlap to the greatest extent (Allen & Turner 2015). While the survey tool did not ask individuals to explain what types of locations they were marking, interviews revealed that the three most commonly marked spaces were either small businesses (restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and other merchants), grocery stores, shopping malls, or the homes of friends/family.
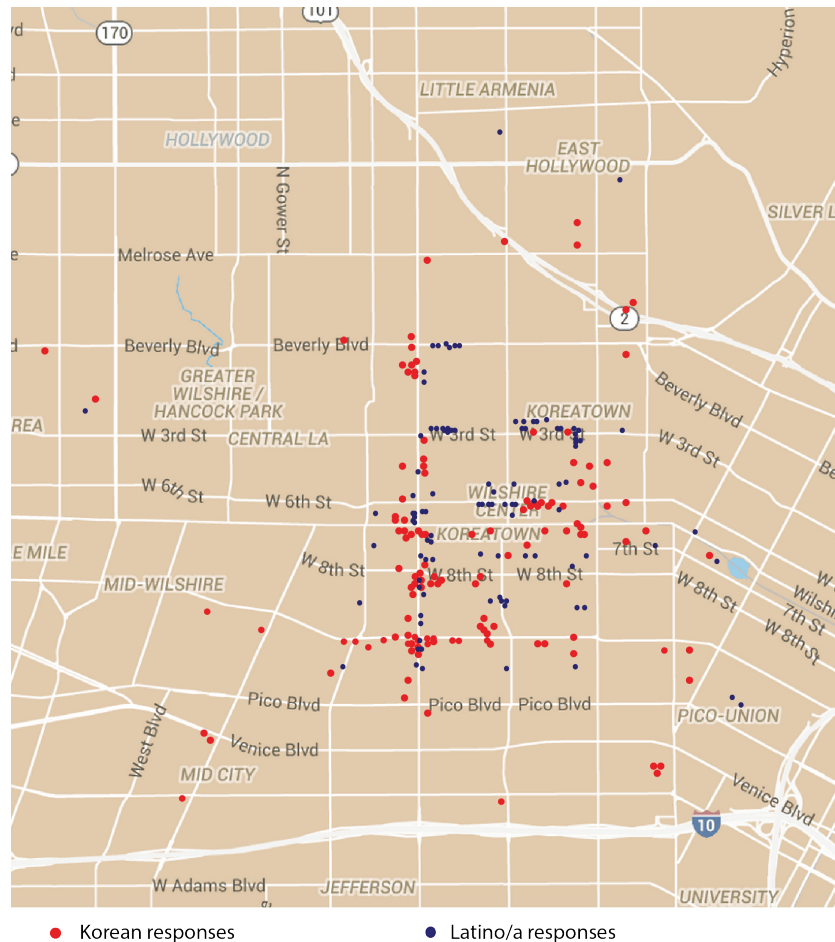

Figure 22: Locations frequented by Korean and Latino/a respondents

With regards to neighborhood boundaries, there was more nuance in terms of how different individuals responded. Utilizing similar methods to that of Andrew Mondschein's study of neighborhood perceptions in Koreatown, *Out of Many, One Neighborhood: Mapping and*

Understanding Neighborhoods as the Aggregate of Individual's Cognitive Maps (2004), I

aggregate the drawn boundaries of respondents to find an "average centroid", represented by the

darkest shaded regions of the maps. The average centroid area represents the area most

frequently cited as being part of the neighborhood. Mondschein's study, although focusing

specifically on Koreatown, demonstrates that both Koreans and Latino/as more closely agree

upon boundaries than other ethnic groups (e.g. non-Hispanic whites and blacks), which he

attributes to the former's stronger feeling of ownership over the area. He also finds that these

boundaries closely resemble other more official measures of the neighborhood boundaries, such

as those defined by the Neighborhood Council.

As mentioned, my dissertation questions the idea of official neighborhood boundaries in

this area, given that there are often contradictory perceptions from groups with varying levels of

"official" status. Therefore, I move one step beyond Mondschein's study by surveying residents

in a larger area where neighborhood boundaries are less clear. I also explore relationships based

upon other demographic and social characteristics such as age and level of community

engagement, rather than just ethnicity. In doing so, my findings illustrate that neighborhood

boundaries are perceived based upon the different ways in which one experiences or participates

in their community.

Beginning with the most highly concentrated ethnic group, Koreans, Figure 23 shows that

this group has drawn a fairly large average centroid area, which dissolves outward in concentric

circles. All Korean respondents also referred to their neighborhood as "Koreatown." Some drew

an area reaching almost five-square miles, while others drew an area of only four or five city

blocks. As such, Korean respondents' drawn boundaries do not correlate with the locations of

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where they report to spend the most time in the neighborhood. In recent decades, Korean businesses have opened more and more north of this initial area, which explains why some boundaries were drawn stretching so far up.
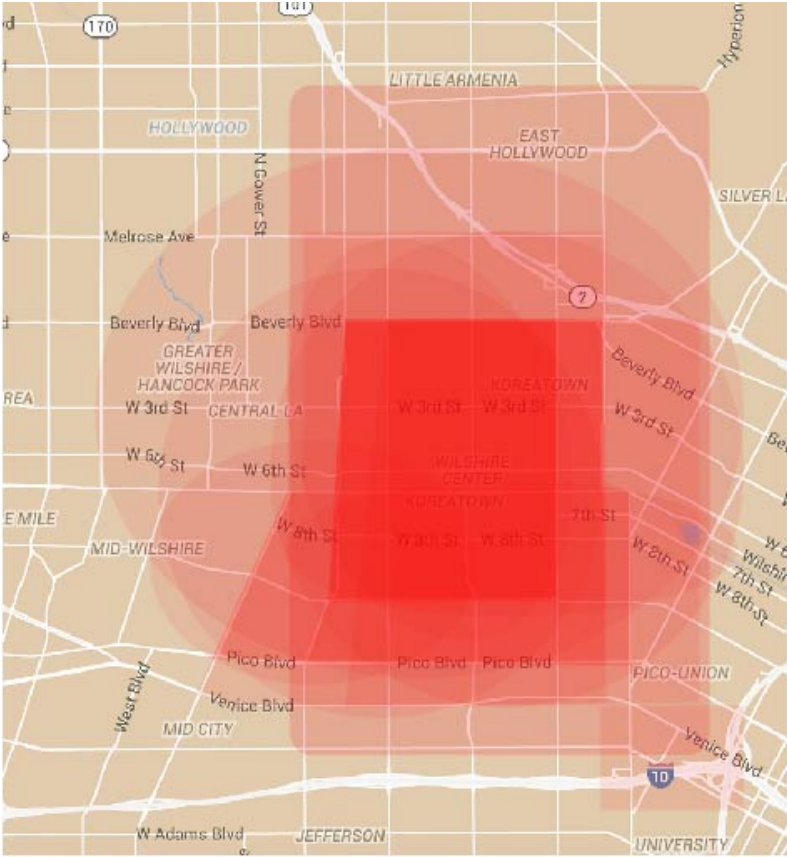

Figure 23: Map of neighborhood boundaries drawn by Korean respondents

Latino/a respondents exhibited a greater range of responses to neighborhood boundaries (see Figure 24), largely due to the fact that Latino/a residents are spread throughout the study area. Latino/a residents also referred to the neighborhood in a diversity of ways depending on where in the study area they were located. Koreatown, Pico-Union, or East Hollywood were the neighborhood names most frequently used. Latino/a respondents were grouped into one category

because there was no significant differentiation between national or regional identities (e.g.

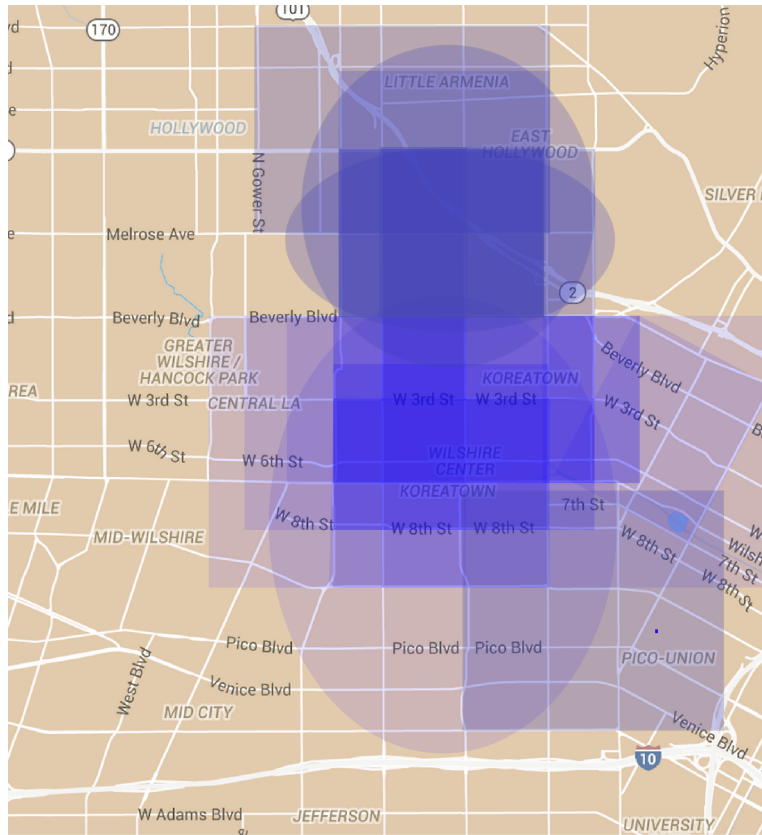Guatemalan, Salvadoran, Oaxacan).

Figure 24: Map of neighborhood boundaries drawn by Latina/o respondents

Thai, Armenian and Bangladeshi respondents drew fairly consistent boundaries around their

officially designated areas (see Figure 25). As expected, there is significant overlap between

Thai and Armenian responses, as there is with Bangladeshi and the aforementioned Korean

responses, given that in both areas the two neighborhoods overlap significantly. Whites, blacks,

and other minority groups in the area drew very different boundaries (see Figure 26). These

groups were also most likely to report different names for their neighborhood that are not tied to

a particular ethnic group--some were part of a different designated neighborhood, such as with

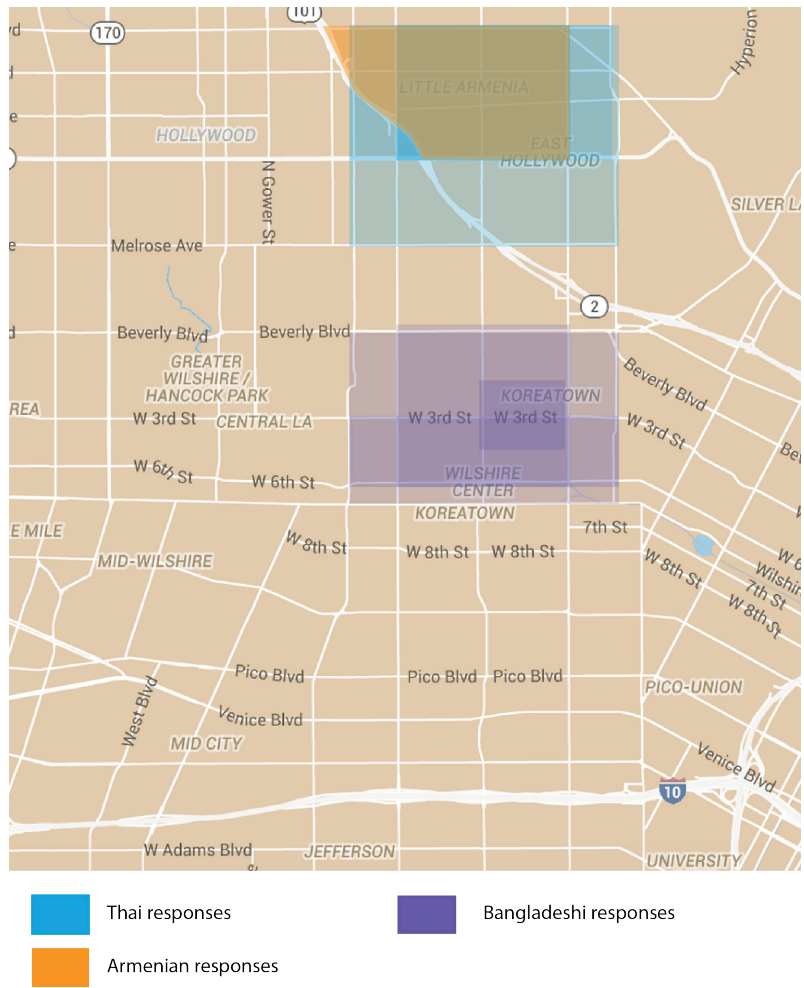Virgil Village and Melrose Hill. Others were not, as with Kingsley Manor.

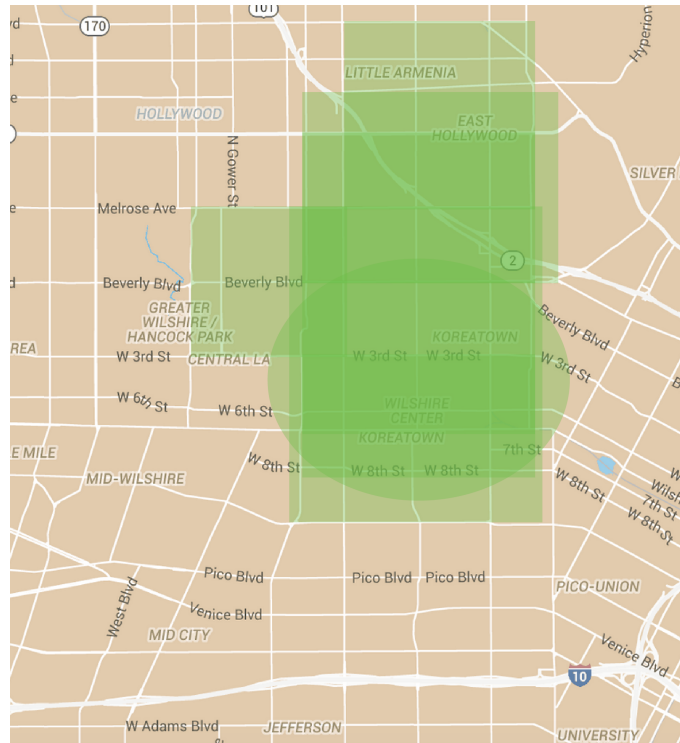Figure 25: Map of neighborhood boundaries drawn by Thais and Bangladeshis in study area.

Figure 26: Map of neighborhood boundaries drawn by whites, blacks, and other minority groups in study area.

These differences could be explained by a number of factors. The common reference to "Koreatown" amongst Korean and Latina/o residents is likely due to the fact that these two ethnic groups are predominantly the workers at local restaurants, shops, and markets--the ethnic small businesses that make up the commercial landscape of this area. Other minority ethnic groups and non-ethnic groups that live in the area reported to working outside the neighborhood. As these groups make up a small number of residents, the number of respondents in these categories is also relatively small, and thus there is a lack of data to show any real patterns amongst them. Further breaking down the Latino/a category into nationality categories also reveals very little, as there is a very similar average territory drawn by groupings of Guatemalan, Salvadorian, Mexican, and Oaxacan respondents.

As with the survey responses on cultural assets, the cognitive mapping exercises revealed relationships between how residents perceive of and experience the neighborhood. First, young respondents (between the ages of 18 and 28) across ethnic and non-ethnic groups and external stakeholders (developers and public officials) had similar responses. They each marked particular commercial corridors and nightlife amenities--largely bars, restaurants, and clubs--as important cultural assets (see Figures 27 and 28). That the area around Koreatown had by far the highest concentration of cultural assets in the area is illustrative of the fact that this part of Wilshire Center is where the most nightlife amenities and liquor licenses are located. The boundaries drawn for these groups were also similar in that they were closely drawn around these commercial and nightlife corridors.
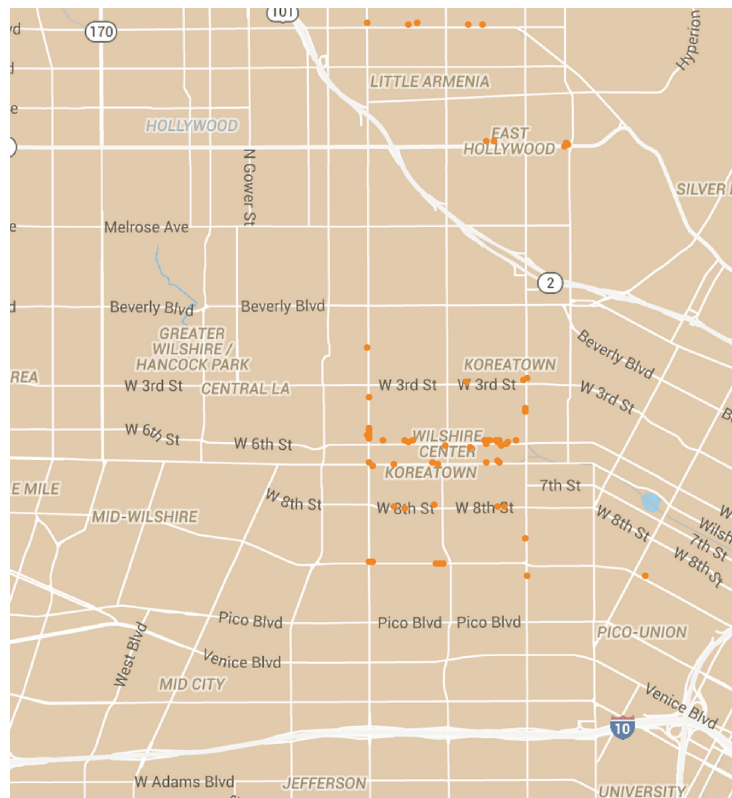

Figure 27: Locations frequented by young (ages 18-28) respondents
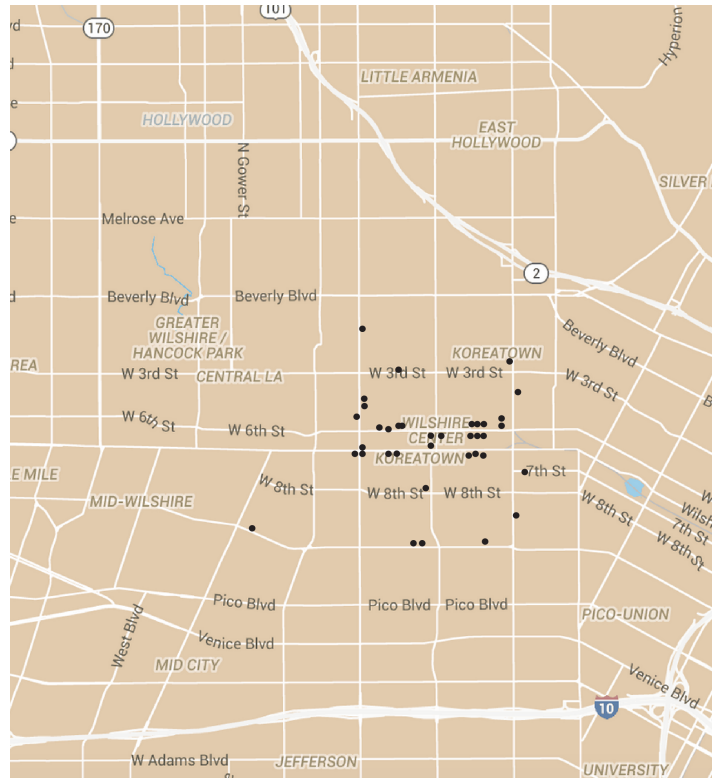
Figure 28: Map of neighborhood boundaries drawn by external stakeholders

Secondly, those respondents who reported being very active in the neighborhood, either through community based organizations, the Neighborhood Council, or individual activism, drew boundaries that were almost identical--they have the strongest common neighborhood centroid of any group (see Figure 29). This is explained by the fact that many of these individuals were directly or indirectly involved in the neighborhood designation process, and thus have a common understanding of what the boundaries of their neighborhood are. It is also worth noting that these respondents largely claimed to be from either of the two designated neighborhoods--Koreatown and Thai Town (the next most common responses were Wilshire Center or East Hollywood). As will be discussed later, these two neighborhoods are also the sites that have undergone more concerted efforts of cultural urban revitalization, much of which is being led by community based organizations and developers with social and cultural ties to the community.
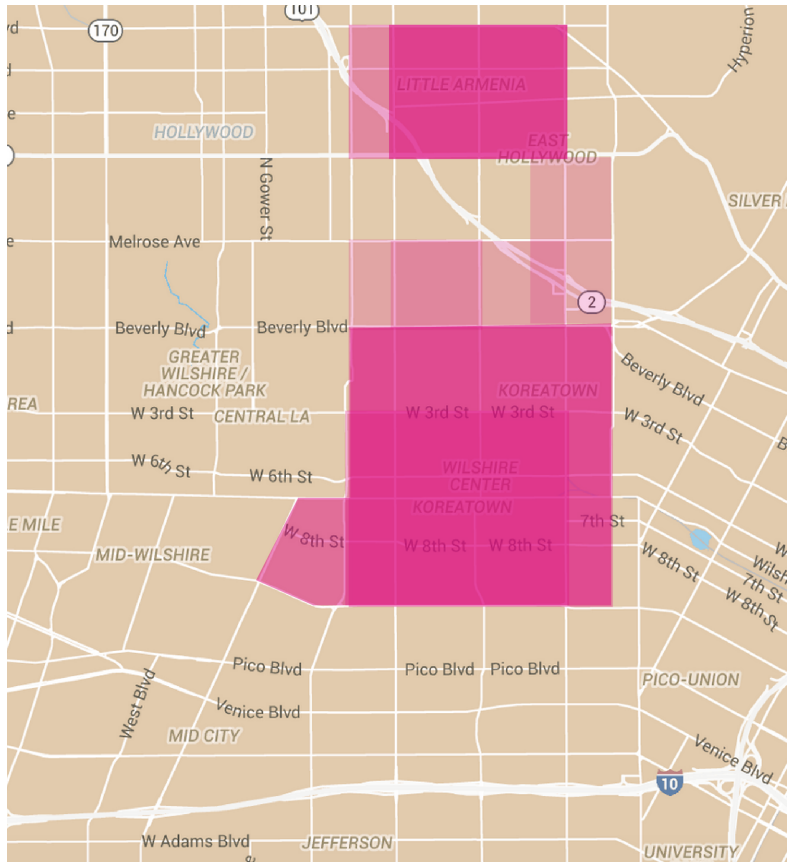
Figure 29: Map of neighborhood boundaries drawn by civically active respondents in study area.

Taken together, the results of these surveys and cognitive maps demand a more nuanced understanding of how multi-ethnic communities define and locate the culture of their community. In previous studies, relatively homogenous and spatially segregated ethnic communities have a common experience of the culture, or place identity, of their neighborhood. This mutually shared history, identity, and spatial proximity allows for the grassroots engagement and civic participation needed to operationalize culture for the purposes of community development. Typically, this occurs in particular spaces and amenities in the

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neighborhood: painting murals in public spaces, organizing business owners to invest in street fairs and other cultural events, or creating programs that support local entrepreneurs.

However, in Wilshire Center, where the boundaries of culture are amorphous, these same spaces and amenities are highly shared. The survey here indicated that a large number of survey respondents from a cross section of ethnic groups marked the very same amenities (primarily supermarkets and restaurants) as both a frequent space for socializing, as well as an important cultural asset of their community. Such results might indicate a high level of community place attachment. However, as will be shown later, community stakeholders who may share a common sense of place and exhibit strong attachment don't always agree as to how best to preserve or improve their community. The diverse streetscapes of Wilshire Center--such as in 8th St and Olympic Ave, examined above--cannot be said to be solely part of the Korean, Mexican, or Central American communities that occupy the area. Instead, the residents, workers, and shoppers that regularly inhabit this area come from each group. In other words, while it can easily be said that a restaurant is Korean if it serves Korean food and is owned by a Korean family, the fact that both the workers and customer base is an equal mix of both Koreans and Latinos begs that we interpret it as something entirely different. These areas with a high level of intermixing have been shown to be commercial corridors with a high density of ethnic businesses and pedestrian activity. For the majority of respondents, their neighborhood consisted of and was bounded by these commercial streets. The high level of overlap indicates that their cultural-spatial boundaries are not only highly amorphous, but in flux. As will be discussed later, many individuals actively try to increase or preserve a particular cultural group's presence in these areas in order to build a stronger sense of community place attachment to the area.

These findings also raise questions regarding how to interpret cognitive mapping exercises. Pioneers of this methodology (Lynch 1960) would have argued that similarly drawn cognitive maps are indicative of an environment that is highly "imageable", or rather, designed in such a way that it is easily navigated and understood by pedestrians. However, when we take into consideration the different ways in which diverse groups of residents perceive and experience their neighborhood in terms of both geography *and* culture, similarly drawn cognitive maps may point to another conclusion: that common interpretations of place reflect a shared positionality of the respondents. In other words, rather than conclude that the neighborhood of "Koreatown" or "Thai Town" is highly imageable, we must examine how the experiences and actions of the user have shaped their understanding of the space. Furthermore, cognitive mapping in this dissertation has proven to be a political exercise in and of itself. Drawing a particular boundary or identifying a cultural asset of the neighborhood is in itself a way of laying claims to space, particularly for those respondents who claim to be active members of the community.

This section has explored how different community stakeholders define the culture of their neighborhood, where they spend the most time in their neighborhood, and how they perceive the boundaries of their neighborhood. Responses were not correlated based upon ethnicity, but rather individuals' age, occupation, and level of community engagement. The different ways in which groups define and locate the culture of their community is corroborated by the types of collaborations and contestations that occur between stakeholders over this shared space. As will be examined in the following section, these interactions shape the social, cultural, and physical landscape of the area.

CHAPTER 8 - COLLABORATIONS AND EXCHANGES

The cognitive asset mapping exercise in the previous chapter demonstrated that there are certain commonalities between community stakeholders in terms of how they experience and perceive their neighborhood and its cultural assets. Interviews confirm that there is a significant overlap between particular groups because of their consistent collaboration with one another and participation in local affairs. These collaboration typically occur through local community-based organizations (CBOs) that work with and within immigrant populations, and whose interests are aligned in seeking to improve the quality of life of long-term residents. Because of their shared missions, these groups assist one another in a variety of capacities, from the creation of new organizations to building social movements.

Community-Based Organizations

The extreme overlap of ethnic populations requires that active community members from different groups interact. A perhaps unintended effect of the City's policy for neighborhood designation is that it encourages this, as proximate groups seek to designate a common area. For example, in 2008 a petition was filed to designate the 50-square block area widely considered to be Koreatown (though not *officially* designated under the new policy at that time) to become "Little Bangladesh"[23]. The Korean community responded by submitting their own application,

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[23] Census data on the number of individuals of Bangladeshi heritage in this specific area is not available. Nevertheless, the growth of this community in such a short time is substantial. According to the 2000 Census, there were only 1,700 Bangladeshis in all of Los Angeles County. However, according to the Bangladeshi consul general, there are now around 15,000, with some 25,000 in all of Southern California, making the region the nation's second

and after a process of mediation by the District's Councilmember at the time, Tom LaBonge, the Koreans received the 50-blocks they requested, with Little Bangladesh only receiving a four square block area completely encapsulated by Koreatown. A related debacle over what to name a place occurred nearby, as community groups debated the validity of renaming part of Westlake as the Central American Cultural District (Kitazawa 2012).

My interviews revealed extensive social networks between individual activists and community organizations (particularly ethnic organizations) across ethnic neighborhoods. While the media has portrayed this situation and others as some kind of ethnic territorial conflict (Abdulrahim 2010), the reality is that more often than not, the groups involved in neighborhood designation work together in good faith. Those interviewed who were involved in this process explained that, prior to filing an application, many consulted with leaders from other ethnic communities who already went through it, the reason being that although the petition is fairly simple, the designation process is considered by many to be simply the first stop in a larger process of community and economic development. As was the case with Little Bangladesh, Thai Town, and Little Armenia, neighborhood designation was the first step in the founding of new community organizations.

For example, leadership from Thai Town is currently assisting several individuals in trying to set up a Little Armenia Community Development Corporation (CDC), and they are drawing from the model used by the Thai CDC. Despite having vague and overlapping boundaries, these two parties felt it was important to collaborate in improving the quality of life

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largest home to Bangladeshis (after New York City). See See
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/07/us/07koreatown.html?_r=0

of individuals that work and reside in their shared space. When asked about how this close

proximity of ethnic designated neighborhoods affects their ability to establish broad-based

community participation, one non-profit leader of an organization in Little Armenia explained:

> I always see it as an opportunity, because it is an opportunity to reach another ethnic
> group, and partner with them to do something. We have been talking about doing the
> gates of Little Armenian, like in Chinatown. Or, doing something with the symbol of
> Armenia, and we would do it similar to the Thai Town lampposts. We wouldn't be able
> to accomplish this if we didn't have the support of Thai Town, or the El Salvadorean and
> Mexican communities in the realm (non-profit leader).

As such, rather than incite disputes, the emergence of neighborhood designation has in some

respects encouraged collective action across ethnic community-based organizations. For many

groups, the application process is a means through which to form partnerships that later feed into

other community development efforts. For instance, during fieldwork I followed several CBO

leaders from Little Bangladesh and Koreatown, as well as representatives of the Latino/a

population, who met frequently in order to explore ways to mobilize their respective bases for

the purposes of advocating for a new park in the study area. Each party recognized that the

political will in City Hall could only be established if the community's voice were broad and

multi-ethnic.

These findings reflect the survey results, which showed that active members of the

community consistently chose community organizations as the most important cultural assets of

the community. Amongst those interviewed from Little Bangladesh, Koreatown, "Little

Oaxaca", Thai Town, and Little Armenia, all leaders mentioned that community organizing and

participation are important aspects of the culture of their community. Respondents also

consistently acknowledged the diversity of their community, which they viewed as an asset as

well. Many of those interviewed described the area as a "melting pot" or "mosaic" of different cultures, and some even used the language of "brothers and sisters" in describing their multiracial counterparts. This awareness of the area's multiple and overlapping identities reflects Relph's concept of an "authentic sense of place". As one local leader of a Oaxacan neighborhood association explained:

> To do this work you have to pay attention to people's different needs, and to respect their heritage. You must grab hands and walk together. I've worked with communities all my life, and like I said, bringing ethnic groups together is very difficult. But I am very stubborn, and I don't care if you are Jewish or Bangladesh, or Hindu, or Mongolian, of Filipino, Anglo, Black, Mexican, whatever. I'm going to knock on your door. I'm going to tell you, if you are calling yourself a community leader, you must bring people together (leader of CBO)

With that said, the designation of an ethnic place name is not significant in and of itself. According to respondents, the purpose of gaining a place name is simply the recognition from the City and the public that this particular group's history is important. In fact, all admitted that the naming really has little effect on the day-to-day lives of their diverse community members. More important is how, upon receiving a place name, one is able to garner community support for efforts, such as community clean-ups and voter engagement.

With that said, for those residents interviewed, whose ethnic identity corresponded with the designation of their neighborhood (i.e. Thai residents in Thai Town), neighborhood designation was considered an important asset of the community. The same was true for individuals who, whether ethnic or not, were active in the community through local organizations. However, for non-ethnic residents, neighborhood designations were of little importance. Amongst external stakeholders there was also a bit of a divide. Developers

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interviewed reported that neighborhood designation was relatively unimportant, although they admitted that the new names may in some instances attract wealthy residents--a sign that the area is ripe for new high-end development. Ultimately, developers responded that the name itself has no direct impact on property values, which is the most important statistic they follow in deciding where to develop. Public officials, on the other hand, felt that neighborhood designation is a sign of civic success. As one put it:

> "When residents get together and decide they want to establish a neighborhood that reflects their own culture, it is a sign that they are becoming more politically active, that they have a stake in their community. These are important aspects of a functioning democracy, whether at the local, City, or National level" (public official).

The collaboration between community organizations has its limitations, however. Fieldwork revealed that, although networks of groups interact regularly in planning local civic activities, there were no concerted efforts at shaping local development. During City Hall public hearings for major residential and commercial projects in the study area, very few CBOs mobilized to speak out and shape the project outcome. And, if they did, it, was never part of a collaborative efforts across groups. The developers I interviewed stated that it is very easy to develop large projects in the study area despite the large presence of CBOs because nobody shows up to oppose them. As one developer noted, "you try this same project in Larchmont Village, and you'll have thirty people screaming at you at every public hearing. In Koreatown? Nobody shows up"[24]. Previous scholars have argued that the emergence of ethnic neighborhoods represents a new means by which municipal politicians can broaden their appeal to a growing immigrant electorate, without necessarily addressing the needs of these new constituents (Sheth

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[24] Interview with developer.

2012). In this sense, the designation of ethnic neighborhoods effectively appeases active members of immigrant populations, by giving them a false sense of ownership over a geographical area.

Nevertheless, by attracting greater attention to a particular area's history and culture, receiving neighborhood designation can open up new opportunities for broader financial support. For example, in 2011, Historic Filipinotown--located on the northeast periphery of the study area--was designated as one of the US's Preserve America Communities by First Lady Michelle Obama. The designation acknowledged that the neighborhood *is* "committed to preserving America's heritage while ensuring a future filled with opportunities for learning and enjoyment[25]." Such a designation opened up the area to new federal grant programs, such as the Promise Zone Initiative, which was given to this area shortly afterwards in 2014 (Trinidad 2014). This Promise Zone encompasses not only Historic Filipinotown, but a significant portion of the study area, including Thai Town, Little Armenia, Little Bangladesh, and Koreatown.

The potential for new external funding poses new opportunities and challenges for ethnic CBOs and community development practitioners in general. On the one hand, aligning one's name and mission with the designated neighborhood, rather than a specific demographic group, community organizations open new windows for local and federal funding. For example, in recognition of the growing reputation of "Koreatown", two local community organizations in Koreatown, the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) and the Koreatown Youth and Community Center (KYCC), both changed their names to reflect the new place name

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[25] See http://www.bakitwhy.com/articles/first-lady-michelle-obama-designates-los-angeles%E2%80%99-historic-filipinotown-preserve-america

(previously, their name's read "Korean" instead of Koreatown)[26]. This renaming represents a

tremendous shift in focus of local community organizations involved in social services and

organizing. As one leader of a community-based organization (CBO) explained:

> "We used to be just "Korean", but back then we decided it was time to embrace the
> community as a whole, however you want to call it, Koreatown, Mid-Wilshire, whatever.
> As a non-profit organization seeking government funding, but we really didn't have the
> capacity to serve Latino residents because we didn't have the cultural or linguistic
> capacities, so we had to turn them away. And I felt kind of strange about that, and I felt
> the demographic changes. So after the name change, we worked really hard from 1998 to
> 2004 to build our organization's capacity to serve Koreatown as a whole...So once we
> became more geographic, it was easier for us to justify our mission to funders, which was
> always to serve the community." (leader of CBO)

Rather than focus on particular immigrant groups, the target population expanded to encompass

the physical area, thereby opening up their work to the broader multi-ethnic community. More

importantly, this is a strategic move to demonstrate to foundational supporters that the services

provided by these groups are not only broad in scope, but are serving a particular area that holds

cultural and historical importance. As another CBO leader said:

> "When foundations are looking to make investments, they want to see that the
> organization is a reflection of the community, that it was created by members of the
> community. Having your name show this, helps in terms of funding and supporters, as
> well as legitimacy and the credibility of your organization" (leader of CBO).

On the other hand, organizations that, because of their limited capacity or experience,

only serve a small segment of the community, are excluded from these benefits. Several CBOs

interviewed in the area that serve specific ethnic groups, such as Oaxacan residents, explained

that they struggle to expand their service because they are left out of the funding circles of other

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[26] Interviews with heads of local CBOs in Koreatown area of Wilshire Center.

organizations. Another CBO leader working in an organization that only serves Latinos/as claimed that it would be easier for them to raise funds if they were located in East LA, an area widely known as the cultural core of the Mexican population in Los Angeles. In this sense, the name "Koreatown" actually hurts some local CBOs, who are unable to reassociate their mission or services with the designated identity of the place.

With numerous overlapping ethnic neighborhoods in a common geographic area, local CBOs are forced to embrace diversity in new and emerging ways. On the one hand, the close proximity of civic groups and their shared experiences as immigrants allow for collaboration on mutual concerns--such as access to park space or voter registration--that may be more difficult within isolated ethnic enclaves. At the same time, all local CBOs, regardless of their size and scope, face the dilemma of either expanding the breadth of their work in order for it to be sustainable or face an uphill battle in attracting funders. Policies of neighborhood designation engender this dilemma for local CBOs, as they overlay new geographies on top of existing community infrastructures. When the Latino/a immigrant groups discover that they are now located in Little Ethiopia, will their advocacy programs still be able to attract funding? Or, must they merge with the place-based identity in order to remain competitive? As this dissertation shows, collaboration across CBOs is key. And yet, if you aren't willing or able to collaborate, this land is no longer yours.

Low-Wage Workers Across Ethnic Groups

In addition to the cross collaboration between local CBOs, the extreme proximity of immigrant populations also increases opportunities for multi-ethnic grassroots organizing. In fact, previous scholarship has noted that Koreatown, the largest neighborhood in the study area and the one with the most concentrated diversity, is a model for how low-wage workers can combine their efforts to challenge the hegemony of "enclave politics", in which the interests of ethnic elites ignore deeply rooted, class-based injustices (Kwon 2010). Despite Koreatown's revitalization, the neighborhood and the surrounding areas continue to serve as a gateway community for newly arrived immigrants. As a result, there are still a majority of low-income and very low-income residents living in the area, who not only play a significant role in supporting the local economy (Sanchez et al 2012), but also seemingly have prevented the area from completely gentrifying. Despite the arrival of young professionals, immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and the consolidation of 1.5 and second generation Korean Americans make much of the study area both mixed racially, as well as in terms of income.

Immigrant workers' responses during interviews and surveys were the most varied with regards to defining the cultural assets of their community. The common thread across all of them, however, was the stated importance of ethnic small businesses and business clusters, and ethnic supermarkets. Respondents explained that these are the sites where they spend the most time shopping, hanging out, and socializing with friends. On streets with the greatest concentration of ethnic businesses, there was the most overlap in terms of the locations respondents chose. There was also a slight relationship between respondents who claimed to spend a lot of time in these shared spaces, and their perspective on the diversity of the

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neighborhood: many of those who spent a lot of time in these locations spoke positively of their multiethnic counterparts. As one Guatemalan worker said:

> All of the people around, even though we are all from different states and have different customs, we're all able communicate. Even though I don't speak English or Korean, we can still communicate as community members. So there is no barrier. I feel satisfied with my friend, or my neighbor, because they are often with my kids and I am with their kids. We see each other at restaurants, and can exchange customs (Salvadoran resident)

Ethnic supermarkets in particular are exemplary shared spaces. Despite being Korean-owned, two of the largest ethnic supermarkets in the area hold food items that serve the largely Latino/a population. As was portrayed in the *LA Times* articles, one will typically see immigrant workers from different backgrounds working together, and communicating. For example, at checkout lines there is a Korean woman handling the cashier, and a young Latino man doing the bagging. It was not uncommon to see the Korean woman speaking basic Spanish to the baggers, and vice versa. And, at the supermarkets' on-site restaurants and food stalls, one will often see Latina/o cooks interacting with Korean servers in one another's languages. One supermarket restaurant employee I spoke to said that it was not difficult to pick up on some Korean having worked at the same place every day. Such interactions are also common at restaurants--according to a recent study, Latinas/os are the predominant workforce in restaurant kitchens in the Koreatown area (Sanchez et al 2012).

Nevertheless, while ethnic small business and markets are sites of intercultural exchange, they are also sites of significant class tensions. According to a recent study in Los Angeles, immigrants working in low-wage jobs are very frequently the victims of wage theft, a widespread epidemic in the City whereby employers don't pay their employees the wages they

are rightfully owed (Cho, Koonse, & Mischel 2013). Having spent several months volunteering

at the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), whose primary service for over two

decades has been assisting workers with wage theft claims, I was able to interview and observe

many individuals who have experienced wage theft, as well as those KIWA employees who are

their legal advocates.[27] Based off these interviews and field observations, the most frequent

perpetrators of wage theft in Wilshire Center, and much of Los Angeles, are employees at ethnic

restaurants and supermarkets.

Wage theft is largely symptomatic of economic restructuring and global migration, and

thus cannot be attributed to ethnic or racial tensions. In Wilshire Center, the presence of both

foreign companies and foreign workers from different nationalities creates a situation whereby

both workers and employers may be unaware of local labor laws. Thus in some cases, employers

are not allowing their workers to take a lunch break, being unaware of the law that prevents this.

However, the majority of cases were filed against unscrupulous employers who seek to take

advantage of their workers' ignorance and precarious situations--many are undocumented and

speak little English. Wage theft occurs across all ethnic groups as well: Korean employers

commit wage theft against Korean workers as much as they do against Latino/a or other ethnic

workers, and vice versa.

Because of their shared experience as victims of wage theft, the majority of workers I

interviewed and observed frequently collaborated with other ethnic groups in a number of social

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[27] As KIWA is a multi-ethnic organization, their tri-lingual services (Korean, Spanish, and English) bring in a wide spectrum of community residents from all different ethnic backgrounds, including Korean, Chinese, Mexican, Central American, Bangladeshi, and others. During my fieldwork, I also participated in numerous policy advocacy activities with KIWA staff and members, as well as numerous other organizational allies involved in the campaign, such as the Black Workers Center, the Filipino Workers Center, and numerous other labor unions.

and political activities, from protests and strikes to high-level meetings with policy makers. Those workers interviewed spoke at length of the importance of establishing a common ground amongst immigrant workers of all nationalities. KIWA organizers claimed that such a broad base enhances the power of their voice within the City's political structure. To do so, organizers engage in a number of relationship-building practices to build ties amongst the Korean, Mexican, Central American, and Bangladeshi residents of the area (see Image 18).

Image 18: KIWA membership meeting, Source: Eliceo Oliva 2014

For example, during monthly meetings and workshops, KIWA staff engages its membership base (which is comprised of low-income immigrants), on common issues and concerns, such as wage theft, unlawful evictions, lead hazard poisoning, and immigration policy, amongst others, in order to demonstrate the shared concerns and experiences that low-wage workers face across all nationalities (see Image 19).

Image 19: KIWA workshop flyers, Source: KIWA staff

Through concerted efforts at popular education that raise awareness of these class differences amongst the area's workers, KIWA and its allies has been able to bring together seemingly disparate groups in spaces throughout the study area. Seeing that the city's recent minimum wage increase included various provisions to address wage theft (Zahniser 2015), KIWA's broad based organizing has proven successful in shaping the conditions that affect low-income workers across ethnic groups. Ultimately, it is their organizational experience that arose out of serving the area's diverse population that allowed them to do so.

That ethnic small businesses and supermarkets are the most valued community assets amongst low-wage workers, and yet are also the source of systematic worker exploitation, is emblematic of the unique challenge that multi-ethnic communities face, and which is often overlooked. The desire to achieve an ethnic neighborhood designation places an overwhelming, and misplaced, emphasis on cultural branding as a means of economic development. The extreme fervor with which this takes place in diverse, "multi-cultural" neighborhoods ignores the fundamental class tensions that perpetually disenfranchise the working poor, and who are

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paradoxically those who first constructed the socio-cultural landscape of the area. These individuals work, recreate, and shop at the area's ethnic small business and markets more than any other group. And, while both internal and external community stakeholders across all categories listed ethnic small business and supermarkets as cultural assets to the community, they do not rely on these amenities for their basic needs, but rather casually enjoy them, or, at the most extreme, leverage them as cultural capital in order to further brand or revitalize the area.

Although the study area consists of a mosaic of different organizations that each seek to serve their respective ethnic groups, the extent to which they are able to build a voice and power amongst these immigrant populations they work with is limited unless they can engage with diverse community stakeholders. The experience of KIWA, as well as other CBOs and activists in the study area engaged in community organizing, illustrates the importance of multi-ethnic coalition building in addressing the needs of those left most vulnerable in multi-ethnic communities. However, even the success of KIWA and groups must be placed within a broader context. Despite their successful services and policy campaigns, low-income immigrants interviewed in the study area continue to struggle in the face of gentrification, job and income insecurity, and immigration and customs enforcement (ICE). The role of local community organizations is an important one, but such efforts must be supported by serious public policy changes that remove structural barriers to family stability and upward mobility amongst low-income populations.

As this section shows, community organizations in multi-ethnic areas collaborate to achieve common goals, such as receiving neighborhood designation or building local capacity for social services. To them, the process of receiving neighborhood designation is a means for

establishing a voice in local politics, and building a base amongst the community to get more civically engaged. While there are various non-profit organizations--both ethnic and non-ethnic-- in the study area that provide important services to the community, and in particular marginalized groups, the actual impact of place naming on their ability to do so appears limited. Residents of the area report that the designation has had very little effect on their day-to-day life, or on their perception of the community. Instead, the benefits of neighborhood designation are largely organizational--those CBOs that align themselves with the branded identity of the neighborhood are better able to galvanize financial support. As has been shown, local leadership is crucial for the success of these "place names" (Sheth 2012). With that said, we must scrutinize how the "success" of these actions affects other ethnic populations in these areas who do not share the branded identity of a place.

CHAPTER 9 - FRICTIONS AND CONTESTATIONS

Cultural urban revitalization, as a motor for neighborhood change and gentrification, incites conflict between local groups. Within the recent history of Wilshire Center, this process has led to publicly funded economic development projects, has attracted new residents, as well as new cultural and nightlife amenities. With the presence of so many overlapping ethnic populations, as well as age and income levels within the study area, different groups not only experience and define the culture of their neighborhood differently, but also have different imaginings of what it should *become*. It is this disagreement over the direction of the neighborhood that pits community stakeholders against one another. Given the economic influence of certain stakeholder groups, these contestations hold real power in shaping the cultural and physical landscape of the area.

Gentefication vs Ethnic Preservation

As is often the case in neighborhoods undergoing public and private investment, the revitalization of Wilshire Center has coincided with the growing presence of non-ethnic young urban professionals and "hipsters" (Yu et al 2004; Park and Kim 2008; Sanchez et al 2012). At the same time, younger, second generation immigrants--primarily Korean, but also Latino/a-- who lived in other parts of the city are beginning to move into the area as well. In fact, in some cases these individuals were actually born in the Wilshire Center area, and are now moving back. They are attracted by the area's emerging nightlife amenities and cultural diversity, as well as its

relatively low rent compared to other attractive neighborhoods for young people[28]. The tastes and preferences of these individuals are similar to those of new residents in other gentrifying neighborhoods (Florida 2002, Zukin 2011), and yet, their ethnic background defies the common racial disparity between gentrifier and gentrified. In fact, this phenomena, called "gentefication" by some (a play on the Spanish word for people), whereby new minority residents with relatively higher incomes and education levels move into a low-income community to which they often have personal connections, has occurred in other neighborhoods of Los Angeles as well (Mejia 2015).

Gentefication, while similar to gentrification in that it often involves rising rents and involuntary displacement of low-income residents, differs in its relationship to notions of community identity. As mentioned before, young respondents--including both second generation new arrivals, like non-ethnic new arrivals--marked nightlife amenities and cultural/historical landmarks as being important cultural assets of the area. However, what second generation new arrivals also demonstrate is a desire to preserve the identity--primarily that of their own ethnic background--of the area. Brown-Saracino (2009) identified similar values and behaviors in the philosophy of what she calls 'social preservationist': newcomers who are aware of their role in gentrification and yet actively seek to mediate its effects by taking action to defend the interests of long-term residents. The difference here is that second generation new arrivals actually share the ethnic background, language, and culture of the long-term residents.

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[28] Interviews with newer, younger residents revealed that Wilshire Center is an attractive place to live because it is still possible to find cheap studios and one bedroom apartments, compared to rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods east of Downtown, such as Echo Park and Silverlake. Respondents also claimed to enjoy the ethnic diversity of the area, central location, and access to public transporation.

The perspective of this group on the neighborhood, their place within it, and the place of others, is decidedly complex[29]. Some second-generation newcomers have serious concerns about the diluting effect that the emerging population of non-ethnic residents is having on their sense of community. With that said, the majority of second-generation newcomers interviewed said that such changes are overall a good thing. Not only did they claim to prefer the diversity of people, but also to have more young people in general, who they said share their values more than the first generation, long-term residents of their own ethnic group. Many claimed that the generation above them, their parents' generation, is too "stuck in their ways", which they believe has a detrimental effect on the ability of the community to improve. Oftentimes, they were referring specifically to the first generation's feelings towards other ethnic groups:

> Honestly, I respect and love my family and their friends, because they worked hard to get me where I am, but they can be so racist. They used to tell me not to hang with other kids that weren't Latino. They never said why, they just didn't trust anyone else but the people that lived in our building. And when we go to those old mom and pop restaurants, I just feel they are judging people. (second generation Guatemalan American resident)

These generational differences strike a wedge between long-term immigrant residents of the neighborhood and the second generation new arrivals, and they are not only felt from the younger, second generation. Several first-generation immigrant business owners explained that the growing presence of young people, including second-generation immigrants, is "hurting" the community. They believe that these individuals only care about drinking and partying in the area's nightlife districts, and complain that many don't actually involve themselves in the social and political life of the neighborhood. One individual, the leader of a local community

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[29] Interviews with this category of community stakeholders revealed numerous, and at times contradictory feelings about neighborhood's changes. Many simultaneously appreciated the new amenities (and what some referred to as "the new face") of their neighborhood, and yet held deep concerns about gentrification by non-ethnic newcomers.

organization that seeks to make young Korean Americans more civically engaged, explained that as the second-generation integrates more into American society, their concern for own ethnic community starts to dissipate. In her opinion, this poses a real challenge to developing community infrastructure, such as schools, churches, and neighborhood associations. At the same time, the vast majority of first-generation residents claimed that the neighborhood has gotten both safer and cleaner overtime, which they attributed to both the hard work of community members and organizations, and the arrival of the Olympic Division police station, which opened in 2009.

Given the new local appetite for nightlife and cultural amenities, new bars, restaurants, and coffee shops continue to arrive in Wilshire Center, and in particular around Koreatown. However, because this area has for much of its recent history been a site of overwhelmingly small ethnic businesses (Lee 1995; Light 2002; Min 1984; Min and Bozorgmehr 2000), these newer establishments often seek to reappropriate that ethnic identity in order to cater to new and numerous community stakeholder types, from second generation immigrants to non-ethnic gentrifiers, and young urban professionals to tourists. In fact, many of these places are owned and operated by individuals with close connections to this area.

Amongst these establishments, three were the most often cited during surveys and interviews: Beer Belly, Escala, and Guelaguetza. Beer Belly (Image 13), a bar and restaurant located on the western edge of Koreatown, was opened by a young Korean American who grew up in the neighborhood.

Image 13: Beer Belly, Maldonado 2014

Nothing about the decor or menu is Korean (aside from occasional appearances of kimchi), and the clientele represents a diverse array of both local residents and visitors. Escala (Image 14), a self-titled "Colombian-Korean" restaurant, located in one of the most iconic historic buildings in Wilshire Center, Chapman Plaza, was also started by a young Korean American who grew up in South America, and yet who also has ties to the neighborhood (Hong 2014).

Image 14: Escala, Oriel 2015

Nearly all young people interviewed, named either Beer Belly, Escala, or both as important cultural assets of the community, stating in some fashion how they represent the future of the area. As one respondent explained:

> The area is evolving. I mean, the second-generation Korean Americans, we ourselves are not super Korean. Our neighborhood is going to reflect that. And you now have a wave of second generation immigrant business owners. Like Beer Belly--something like Beer Belly would have never existed ten or twenty years ago. So now the old school Koreans are kind of giving way to this new hybrid, Americanized business. So you can complain you are losing a lot of the traditional Korean places, but on the other hand--Beer Belly is super popular! It brings in a lot of people, and brings together different kinds of people. And Beer Belly doesn't even pretend to be Korean (second generation Korean American resident)

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In fact, several of the employees and regular customers at these establishments and others like them, complained about the behavior of first-generation immigrants who will occasionally attend the restaurant. According to them, first generation Koreans, who some colloquially refer to as "FOBs" ("fresh off the boat"), carry outdated (and oftentimes, misogynistic) expectations of customer service that stem back to customs from generations past. One employee explained that they will snap at servers to get their attention, and expect certain traditional dishes to be served to them even if they are not on the menu, such as kimchi and boiled peanuts. She said: "this doesn't happen amongst people that grew up here, they know to be respectful towards one another."

As the restaurant Guelaguetza (Image 15) demonstrates, some new businesses will blend together the overlapping cultures existing in this area--immigrant and non-immigrant, Korean and Latina/o--as a natural result of shifting demographics, rather than intentional effort at branding. A Oaxacan restaurant on Olympic Blvd, Guelaguetza has manifested the multi-ethnic history of the neighborhood in its architectural evolution. Guelaguetza is actually located in the same building that was one of the first Korean restaurants in the area, "*Young-Bin-Kwan*". Opened in 1974, it acted as a meeting place, social center, and hosted everything from family gatherings to political dinners (Park 2005). When the owner of Young-Bin-Kwan faced bankruptcy in the late 70s and was forced to sell the restaurant, a Oaxacan businessman named Fernando Lopez converted the space into his own Oaxacan restaurant, *"La Guelaguetza."* The new restaurant preserved the existing Korean architecture, as seen in the image below.

Image 15: Guelaguetza, EatMx 2013

Guelaguetza is an example of what Park calls a "lived hybridity", which is "not intentionally or

consciously planned to represent the theme of 'mixed fusion culture' but [is] organically

produced by people's economic and social life" (2005, 350). Outside, the restaurant is adorned

with a mural, painted by a Oaxacan street artist duo known as Colectivo LaPiztola, depicting

children in traditional oaxacan clothes sharing corn and chicken with each other. Inside, one is

just as likely to see families of Asians as families of Oaxacans. In recognition of the important

role this restaurant has served in the history of this area, it was granted a James Beard Classic

award, a culinary award that is given to "regional establishments, often family-owned, that are treasured for their quality food, local character, and lasting appeal"[30].

The ability of these business types to simultaneously attract a broad appeal while also drawing attention to the neighborhood's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural character has "revitalized" the area in a Floridian sense (Florida 2002) by attracting newcomers. While for some, these establishments represent the rebirth of the area as an entertainment and nightlife district[31], to interpret these spaces as typical objects of urban revitalization is to ignore their relationship to a perceived hybrid identity of the neighborhood. In addition to non-ethnic outsiders, young people with Korean, Central American, and other heritages are drawn to the area's new, more contemporary amenities that are still culturally relevant to their ethnic backgrounds. It is also worth noting that all three of these establishments have been reported on in the LA Times, and it was food writer Jonathan Gold, who was responsible for placing Guelageutza into the local (and later, national) spotlight after reviewing it in his regular column, "Counter Intelligence". (Lee 2014, Gold 1994). However, as my interviews and surveys illustrate, despite the fact these particular establishments have become popular destinations for visitors and tourists, they remain important assets to a number of community residents, in some cases specifically *because* they bring together a variety of people, both inside and outside the neighborhood and across ethnic groups.

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[30] See http://www.jamesbeard.org/blog/tag/America's%20Classics
[31] See: http://firstwefeast.com/eat/the-changing-face-of-koreatown-los-angeles/; http://www.coolhunting.com/food-drink/word-of-mouth-los-angeles-koreatown

While many second generation newcomers believe that the area's revitalization (and "gentefication")--as represented by the emergence of these new hybrid businesses--is ultimately a good thing for the social and cultural life of the area, there are many individuals who are hostile towards non-ethnic newcomers. These individuals, who are often also second-generation immigrants, are concerned about the diluting effect that too many non-ethnic residents will have on the cultural identity of their community. As one second generation Korean resident notes:

> I think Ktown is definitely getting more hipsters. Maybe like two years ago, if I go to the bar, it is like all Asians. And then slowly it is turning into, you know--you'll see white people, all of a sudden word spreads, and then it is all white people. And so you walk in and it is a totally different bar. I mean it really make or breaks the atmosphere. Personally, it doesn't feel the same. It doesn't feel homey, you know? Not that like I don't have white friends, or friends that are non-Korean. It is just a different vibe, when you are getting ready to go out in your neighborhood, you want something a little more familiar (second generation Korean American business owner and resident)

These concerns are transmitted in a number of ways in order to regulate the effects these newcomers have on the area's cultural landscape. For example, several Korean bars, known as "suljips", have secret entrances in the back of the building in order to defer non-Koreans from discovering them (see Image 16). Although they have a sign out front, the lack of a typical business storefront acts as a gateway mechanism, whereby only those who have heard of the place by word-of-mouth can gain entry. Some suljips will not allow non-Koreans to enter unless accompanied by a Korean.

Image 16: Example of back alley entrance to Koreatown suljip, Buddha Bellies 2013

Inside of these bars and restaurants, the menus are entirely in Korean, and lack any pictures to guide non-Korean speakers. While oftentimes the staff of such establishments will speak English, regular patrons of such places explain that this is another strategic move, to further discourage non-Koreans from coming here. In addition, Koreatown has a reputation for holding several "afterhours" bars that serve alcohol illegally past 2am. While the city has been severely cracking down on these places (Kim 2015), those that remain rely on their relatively low-profile to continue operating. Still, whether their motivation is simply to maintain a semblance of Koreatown authenticity, or to avoid discovery by the police, such businesses actively try to protect themselves from becoming too popular amongst the growing population of non-ethnics in the area.

The tensions explored thus far have been relegated to feelings and actions amongst different generations of immigrant residents. While the consumptive practices of these individuals certainly shape the ethnic business landscape of the area, the next section will explore how individuals with greater levels of influence are acting to shape the future development of the area.

Ethnic Champions - Insiders and Outsiders

Public private, and non-profit community development efforts abound in Wilshire Center. This is likely a result of its proximity to Downtown Los Angeles and Hollywood, the fact that much of Wilshire Blvd is zoned as a regional commercial center, and because it is well-served by public transportation. However, given the area's history as a gateway community, and its resulting concentration (and recent consolidation) of ethnic populations, many individuals involved in these efforts share a common ethnic background with the residents. As a result, while some local actors seek to improve the economy and quality of life of the area more generally, there are significant efforts at cultural development as well, i.e. attempts to also preserve and elevate the perceived cultural identity of the community. Because of the breadth of their work, and their commitment to their ethnic heritage, I have grouped these individuals under the title of "ethnic champions." *Ethnic champions* are individuals who play an active role in developing their ethnic community through cultural and economic development strategies. Oftentimes, such individuals have various connections with City Councilmembers, cultural institutions, and business associations.

As mentioned, ethnic champions are often the individuals who drove the neighborhood designation petition and application process. These individuals also participate a great deal in efforts that use notions of culture as way to attract economic investment--i.e. strategies of cultural urban revitalization. For example, many ethnic champions wish to brand their neighborhood as a cultural quarter through themed architecture. A group of Korean ethnic champions successfully garnered funds to decorate several streets with markers of Korean heritage. As an individual from this group described it:

> ...we basically developed the vision for economic development based on cultural tourism. So, all the markers, like the pagoda, the lampposts, all the decorative public artwork, were to make it a cultural destination and revitalize the area. And we worked with [our partners] to do heritage marketing, through the cultural parades and festivals that we have today. (ethnic champion)

At the time of writing, Koreatown ethnic champions are currently advocating for a Koreatown Gateway (see Image 17) that will span the entrance of Seoul International Park and the iconic Korean Pagoda (Curbed staff 2015). The gateway is the result of a collaboration between two local Korean organizations, the Korean American Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles and the Korean American unite Foundation, as well as the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative, and designed by John Freidman and Alice Kimm Architects. While it does not draw from ethnically themed design elements per se, it similarly relies on decorating the built environment for the purposes of elevating a neighborhood brand--in this case, that of "Koreatown".

Image 17: Rendering of Koreatown Gateway, Curbed Staff 2015

Leaders from Little Armenia similarly hope to create new public monuments to decorate the built environment and draw attention to the history of the Armenian diaspora in the area. According to these individuals, having themed architecture will attract tourists and visitors to the area. As more commerce comes to the area, it is "an excuse for the city to maintain and beautify the area, which is going to bring in even more money"[32]. Such a response reflects aforementioned articles written in *LA Times'* that claim that achieving designation puts neighborhoods "on the map". In this sense, cultural urban revitalization is seen by ethnic champions as the necessary means by which to attract public and private investment in previously ignored areas of the City. This includes everything from themed streetlamps and architecture to public art.

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[32] Interview with leader of Little Armenia non-profit organization.

The efforts of ethnic champions are often overlooked by the residents in these areas, however. During interviews with residents, those who described these decorative elements as important cultural assets of the community, were primarily individuals who claimed to be civically actively in the area. Be them non-profit workers, local business leaders, or members of the Neighborhood Council, their awareness and attachment to these objects are likely a result of their having played a role in their creation. As mentioned previously, the majority of respondents reported that other aspects of the neighborhood, such as restaurants and grocery stores, were much more culturally important. More importantly, however, residents belonging to ethnic groups other than that of the area's branded place identity, never mentioned these decorative aspects as cultural assets. In other words, Thai-themed street lamps are unimportant to Latino/a residents. This represents the divide between those who wish to use culture as an impetus for urban revitalization, and those who live, work, and experience these places day-to-day. For the latter, the "culture" of the neighborhood exists in the spaces of everyday life (e.g. small businesses, grocery stores, etc.), not the monuments and cultural iconography lauded by ethnic champions.

Aside from themed architecture, other ethnic champions have used cultural connections in order to attract investment in the area. While such developments may not be necessarily about branding the built environment with ethnic signifiers, their social networks are often along ethnic lines, and thus ultimately are intended to support their own ethnic community. In one instance, a leader of a Korean business association organized a trade and investment trip to Korea for Mayor Garcetti and other Los Angeles City Councilmembers. The goal, as he stated, was to try and

demonstrate that Koreatown is an attractive place to invest in, to buy property in, and to visit[33]. Similarly, a business owner and community leader amongst the Oaxacan population in the area used his connections with his hometown in Mexico in order to garner funds that could be used to support the Oaxacan-American youth and elderly living in Los Angeles, from college tuition to health care. By establishing a collective mode of sharing funds, he and others have helped encourage the clustering of Oaxacan business in the south-western section of the study area, what some colloquially refer to as "Little Oaxaca", or "Oaxacalifornia."

The degree to which ethnic champions are able to improve the quality of life of residents versus simply attracting economic investment, is dependent on their level of "insidedness" (Relph 1976) in the community. As Relph explains, being inside a place means that one belongs to and identifies with it. Furthermore, insiders have the capacity to develop an "authentic sense of place", which he defined as the ability to distinguish between the different places and identities within a place. While outsiders may identify with a place, unlike insiders, they do not have a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of identities in a place. With that said, while some ethnic champions claim to have the best interests of their community in mind, their actions ultimately expose residents to over-development, and ultimately, displacement. Those outsider ethnic champions interviewed admitted the difficulties they face in promoting their neighborhood while still taking into consideration that many living there have basic needs unfulfilled, like reliable, affordable housing and access to quality jobs, and who could benefit from services that improve their language skills and access to capital. One respondent summed up the situation:

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[33] Interview with ethnic champion in Koreatown

> ...you have these two forces at play. You want to develop this community into something a little better. But then you have the residents, some of whom are low-income, even very low-income, and barely speak any English. So if you buy up this land, add value, and bring in money, you are going to kick these people out. And the thing is, they just don't know the system--what can they possible do? (ethnic champion)

For these individuals, the identity of a place is singularly defined. Once a neighborhood receives designation, that identity is fixed. From that point on, any investment is perceived as good for that (i.e. the ethnically branded) community. As another outsider ethnic champion put it:

> Am I worried about Koreatown losing its Korean identity? I don't really think so. I think there will always be there this identity. I think the new development just adds to it. First of all, it makes it economically viable, that it has become more mainstream. But also if you just look at pure revenues, the pie increases. That is why you have a hundred BBQ restaurants and they are all thriving. They are all doing well. How is that possible? Because you have an influx of all these non-Koreans coming. If it was just the same, full of Korean customers, you couldn't do that. But you have a BBQ restaurant on every corner, and when you see that, from an economic perspective, I think it is a boon for the local economy. (ethnic champion)

This type of ethnic champion approach is decidedly top-down, using "culture" as an impetus to attract investment. This emphasis glosses over the social and economic realities of those individuals residing in these areas, and operationalizes culture as a monolith, rather than the everyday practices of individuals.

On the other hand, insider ethnic champions recognize that the culture of the neighborhood is shared, and ever changing. The act of receiving designation, investing in themed architecture, and other strategies of cultural urban revitalization, are simply one means to an end. By taking into consideration that the area is diverse in terms of language, culture, and socio-

economic status, cultural urban revitalization strategies are complemented by investments in

affordable housing, social services, business development, and education. In Thai Town, for

example, one ethnic champion and leader of a local non-profit relies on a process of community

engagement and resident buy-in before investing in any street themed decorations or cultural

festivals[34]. According to her, this level of participation is crucial to ensure that any strategy of

cultural urban revitalization is born out of, and serves, the diversity of residents. As she puts it

> ...to ensure a more participatory process, we opened up our campaigns to the community.
> And we made sure to hire Spanish, Thai, and Armenian speakers. And we held a series of
> meetings, invited folks to join the formation committee, and that is how we got all sectors
> of the community represented. And we taught them leadership skills, civics, and how to
> basically do a campaign to get a petition drive going and a postcard drive, and letters of
> support from all over, door-to-door canvassing, how to conduct meetings, how to make
> an agenda, build consensus, all that...For me, the voice of the community needed to be
> heard first, we shouldn't impose our values (ethnic champion).

When it comes to cultural urban revitalization, there important differences between being

a an insider or outsider with regards to perspective and process. Insiders both recognize and

interact with the variety of identities overlapping in shared space, and value participation of all

stakeholder groups in using culture as a means for community development. Outsiders promote

and develop one identity, and rely on access to capital and political networks to attract

investment in cultural amenities. How do to the efforts of each group interact to shape the

development of the community? As Sheth argues in *Ethnic Diversity and the Politics of Urban

Development*, neighborhood and city politics, institutional change, and demographic shifts affect

the success of ethnic communities (2014). As he says: "rather than an elite driven phenomenon, a

variety of uncoordinated, social contingent events and processes came together to produce the

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[34] Interview with ethnic champions in Thai Town.

current ethnic archipelago of Los Angeles" (Sheth 2014, 109). Sheth's work effectively critiques Logon and Molotch's theory of the urban growth machine (1987) by showing how it is shaped by local processes.

With that said, oftentimes, outsider ethnic champions and other external stakeholders have capitalized off the efforts of insiders. According to insider ethnic champions, building local pride in the area's culture and heritage is a means to put themselves on the map, while pursuing efforts at improving the quality of life of all residents, such as increasing the stock of affordable and senior housing. However, the process of cultural branding and neighborhood designation, or as Sheth calls it, "place naming" (2014), are one step in a larger process of attracting new residents and increasing property values. In this sense, their actions precipitate external development in the area. External actors view notions of culture as an important aspect of urban revitalization, and yet to them, culture is an amenity and a brand. They have little desire to acknowledge or invest in the culture that exists in the spaces of everyday life. Ultimately, the motivations of insider ethnic champions are eclipsed by the realities of place-based development: if they are *too* successful, their actions are at risk of actually hurting the community they wish to serve (Crane and Manville 2008)**.** Regardless of *who* puts ethnic neighborhoods on the map, once they are there, they have opened themselves up to the politics of place-based development, and are thus in the crosshairs of the urban growth machine. As one resident put it, "cities are like oceans, the tide comes and goes, people leave and comeback; neighborhoods change. There cannot and should not be one identity of a community" (Korean resident).

CHAPTER 10 - POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

As has been shown, the multi-ethnic neighborhood creates space for collaborations as well as contestations between community stakeholders in shaping the social and physical landscape. These contestations--between first and second generation immigrants, ethnic champions and developers--demonstrate how individuals of the same ethnic group but with different positionalities interpret the cultural identity of their neighborhood in separate ways. Their political, economic, and consumptive practices therefore compete in shaping the future of their of the community. The collaborations--between community organizations and low-income workers--indicate how the proximity of numerous histories and identities can open up new opportunities for grassroots efforts at community and economic development. In addition, the ways in which different community stakeholder define the cultural assets of the community provide new insight into what components of the social and physical landscape should be considered collectively valuable in diverse areas.

Based upon these findings, I identify four policy implications for future planning practitioners:

Greater support for ethnic small business and supermarkets

The overwhelming majority of the interviewed internal community stakeholders chose ethnic small businesses and supermarkets as the most important cultural assets of their community. This occurred across all demographic categories--ethnicity, age, occupation, and

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income level--although the types of ethnic small businesses that groups favor can vary depending on their generation. Efforts at supporting or preserving ethnic neighborhoods must take into consideration their interpretation of the culture of their community. Lending programs for ethnic small businesses, entrepreneurship workshops, as well as facade improvements to businesses and ethnic supermarkets, are some examples of ways in which urban planners and local policy makers could direct their efforts to the actual needs and wants of multi-ethnic communities.

Locate and leverage existing community relationships

The frequent collaboration between community organizations and "ethnic champions" in order to initiate broad community development efforts illustrates how crucial networks of social capital are to collective action in multi-ethnic communities. So-called "bridging" social capital, which occurs across socially heterogeneous groups, allows different groups to share and exchange information, ideas and innovation and builds consensus among groups representing diverse interests (Putnam 2001). It is important that urban planners and policy makers working in such communities to identify this 'radius of trust' (Fukuyama 2000), and leverage these relationships in order to ensure that efforts at urban revitalization are shaped by the knowledge experiences of those already working within the community.

Ethnic place naming/cultural urban revitalization should de-emphasize branding and boundary making

Although different strategies of cultural urban revitalization are widely recognized as important in attracting economic development, building local pride, and increasing cities' competitive edge, this research points out the dangers of relying on place naming, or branding, that denote certain physical areas as belonging to ethnic groups. This is not due to the possibilities of ethnic conflict or violence, which is often overstated in the media, but rather to the effect that branding has on prioritizing the cultural identities of certain groups over others. The resulting cultural hierarchy advantages some local groups over others, such as by funneling financial support to particular groups and not others. Moreover, the place naming seems to only serve the interests of ethnic champions, and the institutional needs of non-profit organizations, rather than addressing the needs and wants of the residential population. Neighborhood designation also has the ability to distract resident activists from the planning processes that mostly impact their community, such as public hearing for planning and development.

By providing a sense of belonging or ownership over a geographical area through an official designation and the placement of signs, the City effectively diverts their attention away from the fact that, similar to the various Little Italy's found in cities on the Eastern Seaboard, these ethnic place names are mere monuments of identities and histories. If the goal is to commemorate local identities, planners and community groups should focus on other means, such as public monuments and/or festivals. These practices do not attempt to lay claims over physical land, and yet still enhance the visibility of different ethnic populations. Decorative

elements, such as lampposts and archways, also appear limited in their impact on local residents' perceptions and experience of their neighborhood.

Support for community-run media outlets that counter negative or reductive portrayals of the neighborhood

Because the metropolitan newspaper is often interpreted as the voice of the community, it plays a crucial role in shaping the public's perception on the social, cultural, and economic realities of a place. As this dissertation shows, rather than occupying one voice in the community, the local media is capable of casting a variety of voices. Nevertheless, each of these narratives serves to open up dialogues with other actors within the growth machine: stories about poverty help to justify public and private investments; stories on cultural diversity appeal to cosmopolitan elite and tourists; those that focus on the immigrant enclave engage with other, similarly struggling immigrant populations; and stories on the neighborhood's authentic, exotic destinations attract gentrifying newcomers. It is therefore important that local groups have the capacity to counter these narratives with their own stories that are both inclusive and community-led. In doing so, those whose interests are ignored or who are displaced by the urban growth machine can respond to false "voices of the community" often represented in the local newspaper. This not only helps build power amongst marginalized groups, but may also result in more equitable outcomes from processes of neighborhood change.

This research also makes important contributions to the existing literature of community development in ethnic and cultural communities. The three research questions posed at the

beginning of the dissertation will each be discussed in turn, followed by an explanation of its contributions in the context of existing literature.

How are notions of the multi-ethnic neighborhood socially and historically constructed?

As we saw previously, notions of the multi-ethnic neighborhood are constructed over time through the continual framing and reframing of urban space by not only community stakeholders, but the local media as well. These frames can compete, overlap, and reinforce one another by means of their ability to reduce complex experiences and events into concepts appealing to their readers. These concepts—authenticity, struggle, diversity, danger—both inspire and justify the activities of the urban growth machine. For example, to document the "success" of immigrant entrepreneurs in "putting their neighborhood on the map" through street decorations and beautification, is to encourage other immigrant populations to engage in the same sorts of activities in order to be recognized by the wider public. Similarly, by reporting on the hidden and rare dishes of ethnic cuisine, local media channels open up previously overlooked communities to cultural tourists and, ultimately, new residents. In either instance, the multi-ethnic neighborhood is simply another asset of the larger urban growth machine, and is constructed so as to allow larger institutional actors—public agencies, private investors, and developers—to tap into its unknown resources.

How do multi-ethnic communities perceive of and experience shared urban space?

The qualitative data presented here shows that two variables—age and positionality of residents and other community stakeholders -- affect how they perceive the multi-ethnic community and experience their neighborhood. By positionality I mean the occupation or role of a stakeholder in the community. Young respondents from across racial and ethnic categories favored particular neighborhood settings such as restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and other nightlife amenities as places where they socialize, and as important cultural assets of the neighborhood. While older respondents did select restaurants as important cultural assets as well, the type of restaurant they chose was markedly different—older respondents favored small, more traditional ethnic restaurants patronized primarily by their own ethnic groups, whereas younger respondents selected newer establishments that represent a fusion of the ethnic populations in the community. Individuals across ethnic and racial categories and ages overwhelmingly agreed that ethnic small businesses and markets are important cultural assets of the community, and where they spend significant amounts of time socializing with friends, families, and neighbors. Respondents who reported to be civically active in their community or who work/volunteer for community-based organizations selected festivals and themed architecture as important cultural assets of the community. This is not surprising, as many of these individuals have played a role in developing these events and places. Regarding neighborhood boundaries, individuals who were civically active chose boundaries that very closely resembled one another. Again, this is likely due to the fact that they may have been involved in the neighborhood designation process. For the vast majority of respondents, however, neighborhood boundaries were vague and varied extensively.

How do multi-ethnic communities occupying the same or overlapping neighborhoods

operationalize culture to claim territory?

As explained earlier, the actions of ethnic champions, such as developers, non-profit workers, or other local activists often intersect as they pursue varying strategies of cultural urban revitalization. Developers, regardless if they belong to the dominant ethnic group or not, tend to pursue more singular notions of culture, such as nightlife amenities and themed architecture. However, there are a number of ethnic champions, many of whom are leaders of community-based organizations, who demonstrate a stronger sense of place, and thus are willing to embrace more multifaceted notions of culture and identity. While some of their strategies of neighborhood improvement may rely on themed architecture and cultural festivals, these are often used as tools to attract public and private investment to underserved populations across ethnic categories. Moreover, ethnic champions with a stronger sense of place are also more likely to collaborate with other community stakeholders from other ethnic groups. With the City's formalizing of neighborhood designation, this has become a commonly sought after first-step for neighborhood revitalization by all ethnic champions. There are certainly benefits to being "put on the map", as the increased recognition allows ethnic champions to further mobilize resources for community improvement. Moreover, the process of seeking neighborhood designation has oftentimes led to the creation of new community associations and infrastructures. With that said, as ethnic populations continue to move and reconsolidate themselves, it is important to remain critical of place naming or neighborhood designation along ethnic lines. For minority groups in

overlapping areas, neighborhood designation tends to crowd out their own interests and further

remove their own cultural community from public recognition. Most importantly, neighborhood

designation is largely symbolic and has been shown to have a very limited impact on the cultural

assets of the community that residents actually care about--the social spaces of everyday life.

Contributions and Future Research

The emergence of cultural planning and revitalization strategies has emphasized the

potential that ethnic neighborhoods have to not only use culture as an impetus for community

development but to become assets to the city at large as representatives and representations of

the population's diversity. This idealization of the relatively homogeneous immigrant

community implies a false dichotomy between ethnic communities and non-ethnic communities

without allowing for more nuanced conceptions of diverse cultural communities somewhere in-

between. In other words, a neighborhood with a large number of Mexican immigrants is

necessarily a "Mexican neighborhood", and therefore must implement strategies that highlight its

Mexicanness. For areas with overwhelmingly one ethnic or national identity, this of course

makes sense. However, as in-migration and out-migration continue to occur between countries,

across cities, and even within neighborhoods, planning scholars must investigate strategies of

cultural urban revitalization that do not rely on static notions of spatialized cultures. By

examining how diverse community stakeholders define their community and rely on culture as a

means for community improvement, this research adds depth and nuance to the existing literature

on cultural urban revitalization in ethnic neighborhoods. Rather than interpret a neighborhood's

culture through its title or predominant ethnic population, we must instead investigate how overlapping populations might collaborate to construct an inclusive place identity that recognizes various cultures and histories.

Doing so requires a conceptual shift in research that similarly approaches the neighborhood as the unit of analysis. The days when cities consisted only of "the ghetto, the enclave, and the citadel" (Marcuse 1997) are beginning to disappear. Particularly in large urban areas like Los Angeles, we must begin to imagine neighborhoods as units that, like smaller cities, are diverse and ever-changing human settlements. This is not to say that communities cannot or should not attempt to imagine or define a common place identity for the purposes of building pride and encouraging collective action, if this is done in an inclusive manner. Yet we must scrutinize notions of ownership over geography and spatial histories implied by ethno-centric designations such as "Chinatown" or "Little Bangladesh." Such designations have the ability to create new power relationships that favor some identities and cultural practices while ignoring others. As has been shown, this has the potential to create cultural hierarchies that favor the community development efforts of some groups, while further marginalizing others.

This research also demonstrates that the spaces of everyday life—the market, the corner store, and the sidewalk—are much more valuable elements to the community at large than those that are typically talked about in the literature, such as murals, museums, and other cultural institutions. In doing so, I highlight the dubiousness of strategies of cultural urban revitalization that purport to improve the quality of life of local residents but do not incorporate the day-to-day routines, habits, and practices of residents into their concept of culture. Although this research

does find that the creation of street decorations and the promotion of cultural tourism are sometime pursued by community leaders as a necessary means to attract economic investment, these aspects are more often than not only appreciated by external stakeholders (as well as those who worked to implement them). Creating more affordable housing and supporting small businesses must be a core element of any cultural urban revitalization strategy that seeks to support local residents.

Future research can expand upon a number of issues highlighted in this dissertation. In cities like Los Angeles that are seeking to formalize neighborhood designation processes, researchers should further compare communities that seek ethnic place names, such as Little Tokyo, and those that seek non-ethnic place names to better determine whether one type of designation achieves more desirable outcomes for residents. In addition, given that this research has found notable differences between how first and second generation immigrants perceive of and experience their neighborhood, future scholarship should also investigate whether neighborhood designation, or other similar strategies of cultural urban revitalization in ethnic neighborhoods, succeeds in preventing the out-migration of second and third generation immigrants from their community. Or, on a related note, does it succeed in attracting the in-migration of new co-ethnics? Given that gentrification was a common concern for residents in the study area, future research could also pursue more longitudinal analyses to examine whether certain strategies of cultural urban revitalization have a stronger connection to displacement in the medium and long-term. Lastly, from a methodological standpoint, I think future researchers could expand upon my utilization of cognitive mapping as a way to spatialize place attachment and investigate how the act of map making itself can build community place attachment. As

some theorists have argued, place attachment itself is a discursive practice, and is often linguistically constructed (Masso et al 2014). I similarly believe that place attachment can be constructed through collective map making, and encourage both researchers and practitioners to explore the challenges and opportunities to this approach.

CONCLUSION

As the cultural economy continues to influence urban development in Western cities, the growing value of ethnic communities is an opportunity for economic development and wealth creation in previously underserved areas. At the same time, strategies of cultural urban revitalization that rely on static and singular notions of culture have the power to exploit and displace communities. By offering a micro-analysis of how such processes play out in urban areas where notions of culture, community, and identity are contested, this dissertation asks that scholars question prevailing notions of the "ethnic enclave", and seek new ways of analyzing and understanding the social and cultural landscapes of multi-ethnic communities. We must not encourage the creation of boundaries of culture in shared urban spaces based off singular definitions of the "neighborhood" or "community". Therefore, for planners working in community development in diverse areas, it is crucial that they pay close attention to how different stakeholders understand these terms, and in doing so unpack them as social, cultural, and psychological systems by which individuals create meaning with and within their environment.

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APPENDIX 1 – SURVEY AND COGNITIVE MAPPING EXERCISE (ENGLISH)

1. What is the name of your neighborhood?

2. How many years have you lived in this neighborhood?

3. Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?

   a. Japanese
   b. Thai
   c. Korean
   d. Filipino
   e. Chinese
   f. Vietnamese
   g. Bangladeshi
   h. Pakistani
   i. Mexican
   j. Oaxacan
   k. Guatemalan
   l. Salvadoran
   m. White
   n. African American
   o. Other: _____

4. What is your age?

   a. 10 – 17
   b. 18 – 25
   c. 26 – 35
   d. 36 – 45
   e. 46 – 55
   f. 56 – 65
   g. 65+

5. What is the approximate annual income of <u>all working adults</u> in your household?

   a. $10,000 - $30,000
   b. $31,000 - $50,000

      c. $51,000 – $80,000
      d. $80,000 - $120,000
      e. $120,000+

Please use the map on the next page to complete the following questions about what places are important to you in your community. A "place" can be anything you want—a restaurant, a store, a street corner, a park, etc.:

1) Please mark with triangles ▲ the places where you do most of your shopping (groceries, clothes, etc.)

2) Please mark with squares ■ the places where you socialize with friends and family.

3) Please mark with stars ★ the places that you think represent or symbolize the culture of the community.

4) Please write the name of each place next to the markers (for example: "5th Street Café", or "Church", or "Don's Market")

5) Where on this map do you live? Draw a circle around the general area.

6) Where on this map do you consider the boundaries of your neighborhood? Please draw them.
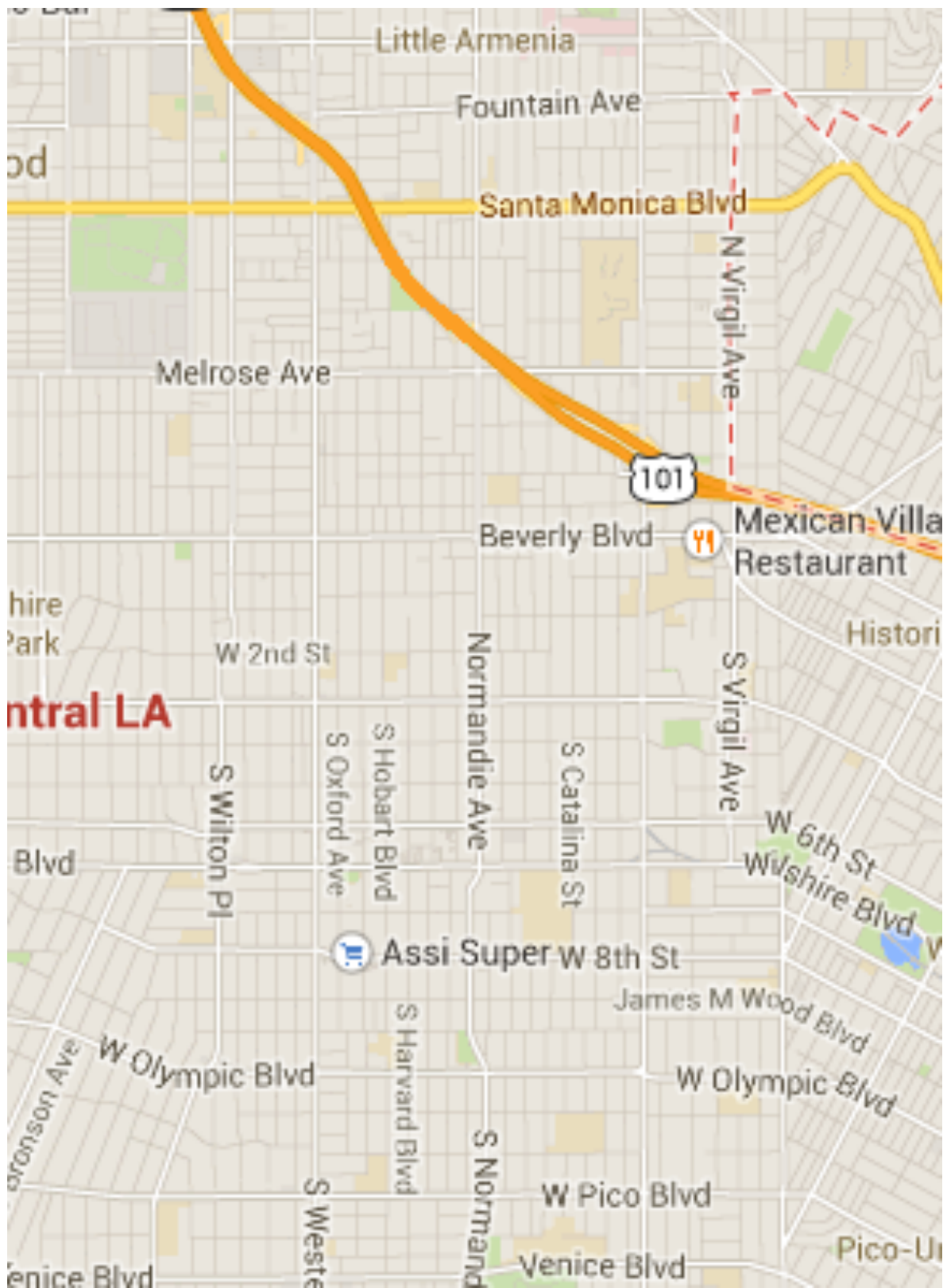
APPENDIX 2 – SURVEY AND COGNITIVE MAPPING EXERCISE (SPANISH)

1. ¿Cuál es el nombre de su barrio?

2. ¿Cuántos años ha vivido en este barrio?

3. ¿Cuál de las siguientes opciones describe mejor su identidad étnica?

   a. Japonés
   b. Tailandés
   c. Coreano/a
   d. Filipino/a
   e. Chino/a
   f. Vietnamita
   g. Bangladesh
   h. Pakistaní
   i. Mexicano/a
   j. Oaxaca
   k. Guatemalteco/a
   l. Salvadoreño/a
   m. Blanco/a
   n. Afroamericano/a
   o. Otra: _____

4. ¿Cuántos años tienes?

   a. 10 – 17
   b. 18 – 25
   c. 26 – 35
   d. 36 – 45
   e. 46 – 55
   f. 56 – 65
   g. 65+

5. ¿Cuál es el ingreso anual aproximado de todos los adultos que trabajan en su casa?

   a. $10,000 - $30,000
   b. $31,000 - $50,000
   c. $51,000 – $80,000
   d. $80,000 - $120,000

e. $120,000+

Utilice el mapa en la página siguiente para completar las siguientes preguntas acerca de qué lugares más importantes para usted en su comunidad. Un "lugar" puede ser lo que quieras, un restaurante, una tienda, una esquina de la calle, un parque, etc .:

7) Por favor, marque con triángulos los lugares donde se hace usted la mayoría de sus compras (alimentos, ropa, etc.)

8) Por favor, marque con los cuadrados los lugares donde se socializa usted con amigos y familiares.

9) Por favor marque con estrellas los lugares que usted piensa que representan o simbolizan la cultura de la comunidad.

10) Por favor, escriba el nombre de cada lugar al lado de los marcadores (por ejemplo: "5th Street Café", o "Iglesia de St Juan", o "Mercado de Paloma")

11) ¿Dónde en este mapa vive usted? Dibuja un círculo alrededor del área general

12) ¿Dónde en este mapa son los límites de su barrio? Por favor, dibujarlos.
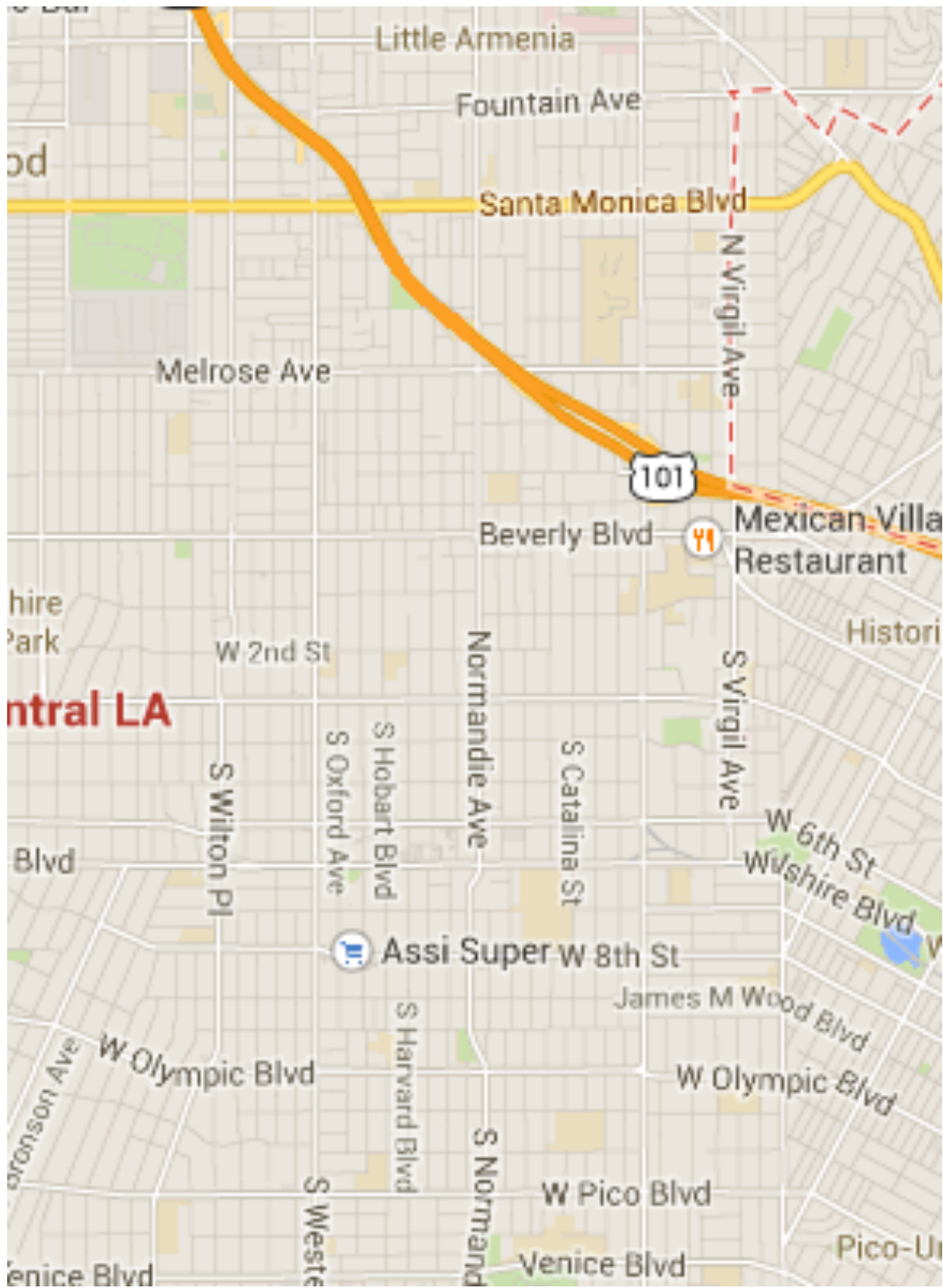
APPENDIX 3 – SURVEY AND COGNITIVE MAPPING EXERCISE (KOREAN)

1. 여러분이 사는 지역의 이름은 무엇인가요?

2. 이 지역에 몇 년이나 거주하셨나요?

3. 다음 중 여러분의 인종적 배경에 가장 가까운 설명은 무엇인가요?

    a. 일본인
    b. 태국인
    c. 한국인
    d. 필리핀 사람
    e. 중국인
    f. 베트남 사람
    g. 방글라데시 사람
    h. 파키스탄 사람
    i. 멕시코인
    j. 오악사카 사람
    k. 과테말라 사람
    l. 엘살바도르 사람
    m. 백인
    n. 아프리카계 미국인
    o. 그외: _____

4. 어느 나잇대에 해당하나요?

    a. 10 – 17
    b. 18 – 25
    c. 26 – 35
    d. 36 – 45
    e. 46 – 55
    f. 56 – 65
    g. 65+

5. 여러분 가정에서 일하는 <u>모든 일하는 성인의</u> 수입을 포함한 연간 수입은 얼마인가요?

    a. $10,000 - $30,000
    b. $31,000 - $50,000
    c. $51,000 – $80,000

d. $80,000 - $120,000
e. $120,000+

다음장에 있는 지도를 이용해서 커뮤니티에 어느 장소가 여러분에게 중요한지 질문에
답해주세요. "장소"란 여러분이 원하는 어떤 것이라도 관계없습니다. – 식당, 상점, 교차로,
공원 등등:
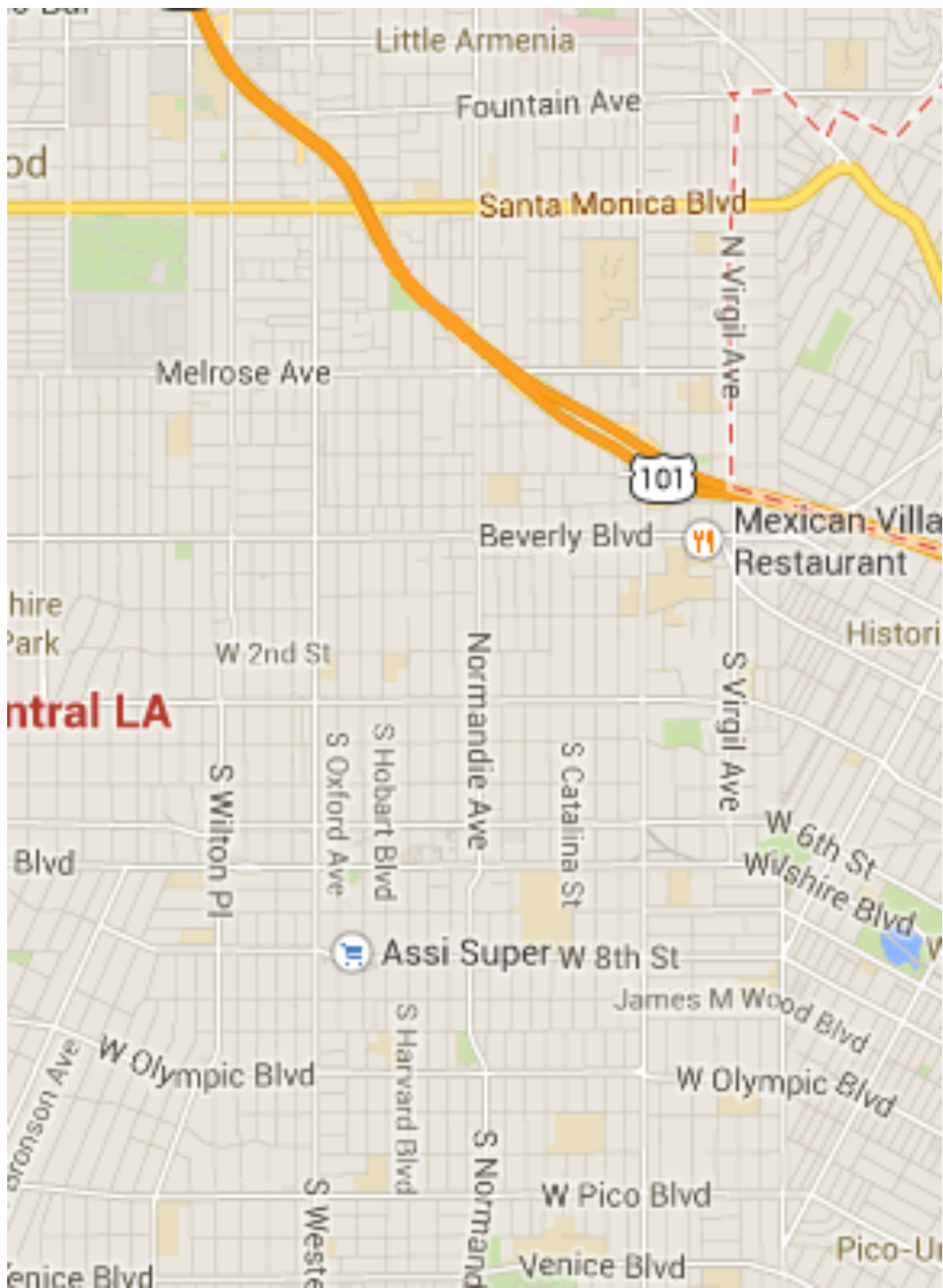
13) 가장 많이 사핑을 하는 곳(식료품점, 옷가게 등등) 에는 삼각형을 표시해주세요.

14) 가족이나 친구들과 가장 많은 사교모임을 갖는 장소에는 네모를 표시해주세요

15) 커뮤니티의 문화공간이라고 생각되는 곳에 별을   표시해주세요.

16) 표시한 곳에는 장소의 이름을 적어주세요. (예: 5가 카페, 교회, 혹은 돈스 마켓)

17) 지도상 어디에 거주하시나요? 거주하는 지역 일대에 원을 표시해주세요.

18) 여러분 이웃사회의 경계선은 어디까지라고 생각하시나요? 경계선을 그어주세요.

APPENDIX 4 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What neighborhood do you live in?

2. How long have you been living here?

3. What is your occupation?
    a. If you work in a business/organization in the community, what is the nature of the business/organization?
    b. Who in the neighborhood do you serve?
    c. Is your organization/business involved in organizing any social or cultural activities?
    d. Is your organization/business involved in any political activities?
    e. Does your organization/business collaborate with other organizations/businesses in the neighborhood for these activities?
    f. Which ones?
    g. What are the biggest challenges your organization/business faces?

4. Are you active in any community organizations?
    a. If so, which ones?
    b. Why do you participate in these organizations?
    c. Are you involved in any other social or cultural activities in the neighborhood?
    d. Are you involved in any other political activities in the neighborhood?

5. What makes this neighborhood uniquely [Korean, Guatemalan, Salvadoran, etc.]?
    a. What are its cultural assets?
    b. What are the major challenges facing the community?
    c. What needs to be done to address them?
    d. What role does this neighborhood play in the lives of the larger [ethnic] population in Los Angeles?

6. Do you feel there is a sense of community in this neighborhood?
    a. Do you feel you belong to this community?
    b. Do you think this neighborhood is ethnically diverse?
    c. Are there neighborhood spaces and activities that bring different ethnic groups together?
    d. Are there conflicts among ethnic groups in the neighborhood? What types of conflicts?
    e. What other ethnicities live in this community?
    f. Do you have a personal friend in the neighborhood that is [Latino, Asian, black or African American, white]?
    g. Do your children?
    h. Is diversity positive or negative for the community?

7. How has the neighborhood changed since you've been living here?

8. Which of the following best describes your nationality?
   a. Japanese
   b. Thai
   c. Korean
   d. Filipino
   e. Chinese
   f. Vietnamese
   g. Bangladeshi
   h. Pakistani
   i. Mexican
   j. Oaxacan
   k. Guatemalan
   l. Salvadoran
   m. White
   n. African American
   o. Other

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